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VOL. V.

\$2.50
a Year.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS,
No. 98 William Street, New York.

Price,
Five Cents.

No. 59.



HE LIFTED THE GIRL IN HIS ARMS, BORE HER TO THE CARRIAGE, SPRUNG IN, AND AWAY THEY JOLTED.

AGNES HOPE, THE ACTRESS;

Or, The Romance of a Ruby Ring.

BY WM. MASON TURNER, M. D.

CHAPTER I.

BEHIND THE SCENES.

WHEW! How raw and cold was this bleak December night of 1867. This night, long to be remembered by some of those who play eventful parts in the story we will tell.

A scowling sky filled with half-gray, half-lead clouds lowered ominously down upon the city, and the keen north-west wind swept along the almost deserted streets. Then a large

feathery flake of snow; then another and another, whirled down; and the spectral atmosphere of the winter evening was filled with white-winged, scurrying battalions, grotesque and weird, flying hither, flying thither!

The hour was half-past seven; yet, though so early, out in the sparsely-settled districts of the large city, where the lamps were few, the darkness was already intense.

A female figure wrapped in shawls and other coverings, trod bravely on through the darkness of the street—through the gray snow-storm which howled around her. She had just turned from Catharine street into Twelfth, and as she faced the wind she shuddered and crouched closer to the walls of the tall somber houses bordering on the way.

That woman was Agnes Hope, the actress, and she was on her dreary tramp to the Chestnut Street Theater, to play her part in the thrilling drama of the evening. She must hurry, too, or she would be late. Come what might she had to be present when the call-bell sounded.

More fiercely drove the wind along the streets, flinging the snow flakes madly to and fro; more ominous grew the winter sky—more cold and bleak the breath of the storm.

But, the young actress still trod bravely on. The lights from shop-windows were now closer together, and their kindly glare seemed like welcoming beacons to her. But, her breath was coming and going fast; her bosom heaved, and her limbs tottered beneath her. She staggered on a few yards, and then, clasping her arms around the cold, snow-flecked iron post of a gas-lamp, she paused under the full glare.

The beams flared straight down upon her, and revealed a pale, yet beautiful face, bordered by a dark mass of clustering hair, shading it, and gathered away beneath the protection of an age-honored hood tied under the chin.

The eyes standing out of that wan face were wondrous dark—wondrous mellow—wondrous soft and fascinating. Yet they were not bright and sparkling this raw winter night; and the thin, half-blue lids were red with weeping.

The girl could not have been more than twenty-three—perhaps not so old, for the checkered lines of care across the broad white forehead—the deep indentations around the mouth, clearly indicating suffering—the thin, almost cadaverous cheek—the frail, weak form, may all have added years to her looks, and given her a premature appearance of age and contact with the world.

But, despite her coarse wrappings, despite the careworn, grief-stricken face—despite the despairing look of the large black eyes, Agnes Hope was a maiden wondrously beautiful.

"I *must* go!" she murmured; "I must earn my pittance, or what *will* become of us! And mother so ill! She is near unto death; I know it—though the physician tries to cheer me—to make me believe otherwise! Suppose mother should die, then I'd be left all alone in this great city, and in the wide, cold world. What would become of me? And that hard-hearted wretch who lets us have the two rooms in which we live! Live! Nay! starve were a better word. Would I, in such an event, be safe from his persecutions, or, would I then—"

She paused; a shudder swept over her frame; and while she clung with one hand to the friendly lamp-post, she drew with the other the old shawl more closely around her shoulders.

But, the girl quickly recovered herself, and glanced around fearfully, as if she expected to see some dread image suddenly arise by her side.

"Then," she murmured, again; "in that dark hour, God pity and protect me from Willis Wildfern! I know my promise and his horrid oath! Would he dare do such an outrage? I could not return his love; but, he loved me, then, earnestly and truly. And—the other, so noble-hearted—so high-minded! I can scarcely realize that he is one of us? There is something so lordly, so lofty, so grand about Frank Hayworth!

"And in six months he has risen so rapidly, that he has taken us all by surprise. A bright fame awaits him, and Frank deserves it. But, as for me! Alas! alas!

"And to-night I must play that silly, shallow *role*, and laugh, and sing, and joke and grimace! And my heart sick within me! For mother—poor mother—all that is left to me, is almost dying! A wild thought has sometimes flashed through my brain, and an indefinable fluttering at the heart, which I could not control—a yearning hope—a mad desire, as more than once I have seen Frank Hayworth's eyes bent kindly upon me! Does he think well of me? Does his heart kindle toward me?—toward me, friendless, poverty-stricken Agnes Hope? No, no;

he pities me; that is all. He knows my sad tale, perhaps! He knows our wretchedness, and in his great heart he feels for me and for my poor mother. No, no, Frank Hayworth can not love me! I am not worthy of him, and then the tale he has hinted to me more than once! Oh, God! Have I been unguarded—have I been careless—have I forgotten myself, my humble position, and lifted my eyes to him? Have I dared to *love* Frank Hayworth? Good heaven! The answer that comes from my heart—'tis unmistakable! God pity me if I have given my heart to Frank! Yet, I could not help it! And he so kind to me! I would die if I thought he did not love me *some*. To-night we play in the same piece; his eyes will beam so kindly, yet so sadly upon me, and he will *speak* to me! Yet that other tale, at which he has hinted? Ha! yes!"

At that moment the far-off clangor of the bell on Independence Hall boomed heavily on the thick night air.

Breathlessly the girl counted the ringing strokes. She shuddered again; then drawing her shawl once more around her, she muttered:

"Good heavens! Eight o'clock! I'm late! I must be gone at once, for I 'go on' soon, myself; I *must* be there."

As she spoke she turned away from the lamp-post, and plunged ahead in the thick gloom. By this time the pavements were white with spectral drapery of winter, and the jolting hacks and street cars, passing here and there, rumbled with a hollow, deadened sound.

Onward she hurried—her limbs tottering under her, her person thickly covered with falling snow, her feet freezing, her pinched face shrinking under the cold blasts that roared by, until, at last, before her, its bright lamps glittering in the night-air, and flaring under the flurries of the winter wind, loomed up the Chestnut Street Theater.

The girl paused, as two gentlemen coming up the street confronted her. One of them, a tall, stout, well-clad, bewhiskered man, suddenly stopped, as his gaze fell upon the white-faced actress.

"Ha! it is you! my pretty Agnes!" he exclaimed, familiarly, chucking her under the chin with his well-gloved hand. "You need not draw away! I'll not *mark* you. You're late, though; the overture has just concluded, and the curtain is up; but—"

"Then do not detain me, Mr. Wildfern; I must hurry," said the girl, endeavoring to push by him.

"Why, Agnes, although you are in a hurry, yet you might say how-d'-ye-do to your *best* friend! Come, now, Agnes, one kiss, and, why—I'll say nothing about *the rent*!"

As he spoke, he stooped quickly over her. But, he suddenly recoiled; for, like lightning, the little cold hand had resented the offered indignity by a blow on his face.

With a half-muttered oath Willis Wildfern turned away, and joined his companion, who was waiting for him.

"Not so easy, Willis, as you thought! Ha! ha!" laughed the other, as the two men hurried on and entered the theater.

Agnes Hope hastened up Twelfth street, and disappeared in the little alley leading to the rear of the theater. A moment more, and she was behind the scenes.

CHAPTER II.

A GREAT SHADOW.

AN hour before the events above recorded a dim light burned in the humble lodgings of Frank Hayworth, the actor. These "lodgings" were a single room, and a small one at that, in an unpretending dwelling on South Tenth street, below Shippen.

Seated in front of a common table, in the little apartment, was a tall handsome man, of some twenty-seven years of age. He held in his hand a small book containing the *cues* and his *role* in the play to be performed that night in the Chestnut Street Theater.

Frank Hayworth was a handsome man. His head was large and well-shaped—the forehead broad and

prominent, and shaded by thick clusters of jet-black hair, waving and glistening. The eyes were large, dark and dreamy in expression; the mouth was completely hidden from view, by a long, sweeping mustache—darker even than the hair, if possible—which flowed down over the massive, iron-like chin. He wore no other beard.

In stature he was certainly six feet, and his form, though inclined to the slender, was, nevertheless, sinewy and well-knit.

The young man suddenly started, as a neighboring clock sounded faintly in his room.

"Seven o'clock already!" he muttered; "and I have not yet learned my *role*. This will not do! I dream too much, and I have forgotten my ONE GREAT OBJECT! I must be diligent, or I will lose all I have gained."

So saying, he bent his gaze on the part before him, and recommenced his "study."

Five, ten, fifteen minutes elapsed, and with a half-impatient, half-triumphant gesture, he cast the little book on the table before him, and rising to his feet, began to walk the narrow limits of the chamber.

"'Tis done!" he muttered; "I know the part; and now will fickle fortune once more favor me? Will I, in my humble part, again win the pleasing plaudits? God grant it! *I am* going up. *I am* making a mark. Success and money will yet be mine! Then, what bar will stand between me and my darling Sadie?"

As he spoke he paused and glanced at the photograph hanging on the wall; then a soft, yearning expression passed over his features.

"Yes, Sadie, you *are* my darling! For *you alone* I live! For no other woman has my heart ever pulsed! And yet—"

He suddenly ceased his soliloquy, as a look of poignant pain all at once contorted his face. His brow wrinkled into a deep, anxious frown.

"Am I speaking *the truth*?" he muttered, in a voice tremulous with emotion. "Can I search my heart *fully*, and say that it has *not* warmed for other woman than Sadie Sayton? Can I lay my hand on that bounding heart, and answer, truthfully, that my soul has not yearned somewhat, however little, for poor, poverty-stricken, angel-faced Agnes Hope? Oh, God! my brain reels as the answer comes back to me—that answer always the same, and ever ringing loudly in my ears! Is it true? Can it be possible? Have I ceased to love, as ever, my beautiful, devoted, fair-haired Sadie? Oh, no! A thousand times, no! Yet, at the name of Agnes, *I can not help it!* My heart does beat more quickly; the blood does grow warmer in my veins, and Agnes Hope's image is incased in my inmost soul! Do what I can, strive as I may, call ever so loudly on my honor and old-time love! *pray* as I may, that image is there, and I can not dethrone it! Why is this? Is it because Sadie is rich, and Agnes poor? Is it that, through human sympathy, I *naturally* turn to Agnes, and am awakened to her tale of woe and poverty? I am poor myself, and that fact made Sadie's father, the proud old Virginian, frown upon me; bid me, with a scowl and a menace, never again to darken his doors, unless I could come there as one *who kept a bank account!*"

The young man ceased his wild talk, and an angry flush swept over his smoothly shaven cheek. He strode up and down the limits of his little room, his eyes bent moodily on the floor, his hands clasped nervously behind him. He seemed to have forgotten his engagement at the theater, the *role* assigned him, and every thing else, in the reflections crowding upon him.

But again he looked up.
"Agnes Hope *loves me!* I know it; I feel it! Poor thing! Have I been guilty of encouraging her, or has she been brought near to me by the sympathy I have shown her, by the few acts of kindness I have extended her and her invalid mother? I must heed well my ways—must mark well my words, for Agnes Hope and Allan—myself—must never be more than friends."

At that moment the door-bell jingled sharp and loud below. The actor halted in his restless promenade, glancing again at his watch.

Instantly he turned, picked up his *role*, stuffed it in his pocket, and hastily drew on his overcoat. "I must be gone!" he muttered; "I 'come on' in the first act; Agnes! she to play that mocking, giddy part! Well, well! the world is not always just in distributing its favors, and so with stage-managers in making up the cast! Agnes *must* play that flippant parrot's part! But, ha! Come in!" he said, as a sudden rap sounded on the panel of his door.

Instantly the door opened, and a tall, portly gentleman, enveloped in overcoat and furs, his beard flecked with snow, entered the room.

"Excuse me, Mr. Hayworth," he said, hurriedly; "I come on business, and will not detain you."

"Yes, doctor; what is it! I am in a great hurry, and behind time now."

"Well, sir, knowing you to be a friend to Agnes Hope and to her mother, I have just called in to say to you, that that unfortunate mother is fast passing away. I don't think she will live through the night."

"Good heavens, doctor! And when were you there?"

"Not ten minutes since. I am now forced to go away for an hour or so to see others who need my care. I thought I would call and tell you, for Agnes, poor child, has gone to the theater, and her mother is all alone."

"What can be done, doctor? Agnes is already at the theater, I suppose, and I *must* go."

"Very little is to be done, Mr. Hayworth. But, just as soon as you can come, do so. And, my friend, if you have an opportunity, break the sad intelligence to Agnes, for her mother *is dying*."

"And all alone! Horrible! Oh, God, what an uncharitable world!"

The doctor turned toward the door; he had nothing further to say.

Promising, however, to return as soon as possible to the house of the dying woman, he opened the door, hurried out, sprung into his carriage, and drove away.

CHAPTER III.

BEFORE THE CURTAIN.

For several minutes after the physician had gone, Frank Hayworth, the actor, leaned his head on the low mantle and thought deeply. His head was throbbing, and his heart was sad and sympathizing.

"Poor, poor Agnes! Now is her cup full! And to-night—in ten or twenty minutes hence—she comes before an exacting audience in the part of a silly, shallow-pated girl! Alas! how few in that throng will know the trouble Agnes Hope conceals in her bosom! But, people care not! They pay for their amusements, and they will have their 'money's worth,' even if hearts are broken, or are breaking, in the bosom of those who cater to them! Alas, alas, indeed, for 'Christian charity!' A rare article, truly!"

"I *must* be gone, else the curtain will be up before I reach the theater; and in that event there would be trouble. And—to-night—yes! I'll wear the pin which Sadie gave me! My character will allow this privilege; and then it will remind me of darling, sweet Sadie herself. Yes, I'll wear it to-night; *there may be luck in it!*"

Speaking thus, he took out his pocketbook, and, searching through the folds in it, drew therefrom a small parcel, and then the actor held up before him, between his thumb and fore-finger, a glittering diamond pin, in the shape of a hand—the stone being clasped by the tiny golden fingers. For a moment he gazed at the pin, and flashed its light several times in his eyes. Then, with a deep-drawn sigh, he unbuttoned his overcoat, and fastened the jewel in his shirt-front.

The actor was just three minutes ahead of Agnes Hope in reaching the theater that dreary night, and he barely had time to make the necessary changes

In his attire, when the call-bell sounded, and he swaggered through a side-scene, and appeared, amid loud applause, upon the stage, as Hawkshaw, the Detective, in the thrilling play of the Ticket-of-Leave-Man.

And Frank Hayworth had already seen poor Agnes Hope, but had no time to speak even a word of greeting to the sad-looking girl, who stood awaiting her turn to appear upon the world's mimic stage as *Emily St. Evermond*.

In one of the front, second-story rooms of the St. Lawrence Hotel, on this same night of wind and snow, a bright light gleamed forth in the gray gloom of the outside air. Within that room a young and radiant girl was walking moodily up and down, her eyes flashing around her, her lips pressed firmly together.

The hour was seven and the maiden had just returned from supper, and sent her serving-maid down for hers.

In stature this queenly woman scarcely reached the medium height; but the loftiness and haughtiness of port, the erect, dignified form, fully compensated for this—if, indeed, it might be deemed a deficiency. Drooping, womanly shoulders, a gorgeous, swelling bosom, indicative of a warm, glorious temperament, a taper, and yet a full waist, and withal a pleasing, decided plumpness of person.

These characteristics of *figure* marked the girl.

A well-turned, nicely-setting head, covered profusely with waving ringlets of rippling gold—a broad, white forehead, unseamed by line at all—arching brows of the same auburn hue—long, silken lashes fringing over large, dreamy, half-melancholy eyes of deepest blue—a straight Grecian nose, with a thin, aristocratic nostril—a ripe Cupid's mouth, even in its repose bewitching and fascinating—a prominent, rounded chin, sloping gracefully away, without an unsightly fold or crease—to meet the noble neck rising, swan-like, from the swelling bosom.

Such were the points of beauty about the maiden's face which caused one to look thrice at her, and then, with a sigh of sadness, turn away; sadness that all who looked could not possess!

Up and down the richly-carpeted room she strode, her step growing more hasty. The longer she walked, the more she thought.

Suddenly she raised her soft left hand, and by an impatient gesture, flung back the clustering ringlets, which had fallen *en masse* over her forehead. As she did so, a stone glittered in the light upon the lily-white fore-finger of that small, peachy hand.

The flash of the ring-setting glittered in the eyes of the girl. She paused in her restless promenade, slowly lowered her hand just below the level of her eyes, and gazed intently at the ruby, glowing in the stream of light. A softer expression spread over her features—an intense love-light gleamed in her large blue eyes—the stern expression which had hovered around the closed lips fled away, and then, quick as lightning, a pearly tear stole down, stood for an instant on the soft, downy cheek, and then fell upon the ruby-setting, making, by the reflection of the liquid, the stone to glow with a quadruple radiance.

"Poor Allan! I have followed you hither; for I heard that one answering to your description was in this large, bustling city. It *must* be you; for—for there is only *one* Allan Hill!"

She paused in her low murmuring, brushed the tear-drop gently from the stone in the ring, and then flung herself into a chair, gazing all the time at the little band of gold circling her finger.

"Ten long months of weary waiting, of never-ceasing heart-ache, have passed since that black night, on the lonely wharf, he bade me good-by, saying that he would come again and claim me as his bride, when MONEY would be in his pocket. He bade me be of good cheer, that he would certainly *come again*. But time has sped, and not a word! Is Allan dead? Oh, no—no! The thought would kill me. Is he *false* to me and my memory? I have

been true to him—true under all circumstances—true, despite the frowns of an indignant and unjust father—true to him, in following him now blindly hither, just to be near him—to love him, to cheer him—if, indeed, he be here in this great city.

"The description of him was so accurate, so life-like, that it *must* be Allan. And though three weeks have passed since I arrived here, and I have not seen him, or learned any tidings of him, yet I can not go now, without knowing something definite. I *must*—Ha! Fanny is here."

She stopped speaking, as, at that moment, the door was opened, and a trim-looking negro girl, her head bound around gracefully in the proverbial Southern home-maid's style, entered the room.

"What's de matter, Miss Sadie? Been crying ag'in? Dat won't do!"

"I can't help it, Fanny! I can't help it when I think that I have been here, in this strange city, nearly a month, and have heard nothing of poor Allan!"

"Dat's bad, I know, Miss Sadie. But, de fact is, I think dat Marse Allan ain't here; and, to tell you de truth, Miss Sadie, I wants to go back home—back where I was raised. I don't feel right in dis great big city. And den, for dat matter, I don't believe, as I jist said, dat Marse Allan is here, and if he don't care 'nuff 'bout you to let you know *whar* he is, why Marse Allan ain't no great shakes any way, and—"

"There, there, Fanny! Don't speak of him in that way. You don't know what a noble gentleman he is."

"Dar you is ag'in, Miss Sadie! Always takin' his part! Just like you! Why, I sometimes think dat old master, as I calls him yet, was half right in not letting dat young man court you, for—"

"Stop, Fanny! Do not let me hear you speak thus again," and Sadie Sayton's blue eyes flashed fire, and she stamped her little foot imperiously.

Fanny was evidently awed; she did not wish to anger or displease her mistress. She had played with Sadie Sayton, in old-time days, and the girl loved her "Miss Sadie," as a dog loved his master.

So she quickly said, kindly.

"Lord bless you, Miss Sadie! Don't you know me better dan dat? I wouldn't 'fend you for five dollars—in gold, at dat! No, no, I loves you, Miss Sadie, and I'll stay wid you as long as you wants me. And, for dat matter, I'd follow you to old Satan, if we could only find Marse Allan!"

Sadie's face brightened, a happy smile came over her rosy mouth, and, taking the black girl's hand cordially in hers, she said:

"We mustn't quarrel, Fanny. We have been together too long now; and, Fanny, I sometimes think you are the only friend I have in the wide world;" and the maiden broke down, and burst into tears.

"Dar! dar! Miss Sadie, don't cry! I tell you, *dar*, Miss Sadie! You make me feel bad, and—now, *dar*, I *knowed* it! I must cry too!" And the faithful negress bowed her swarthy face over the glorious, golden-tressed head of her young mistress, and sobbed too.

But, woman-like, the emotion in both mistress and maid was soon over, and suddenly Sadie said:

"Give me the paper there, Fanny. I will look over the announcements, as I may go out."

"Go out! and on such a night!" exclaimed the maid, handing the paper to her mistress. "Why, Miss Sadie, you'll catch your death o' cold. I tell you it is snowing *crful*!"

But Sadie Sayton made no answer. She glanced over the amusement column in the newspaper for several moments.

"Yes, I'll go, Fanny, to the 'Chestnut.' It is only a step from here, and I have long wanted to see the 'Ticket-of-Leave-Man.'"

In ten minutes from that time the beautiful Sadie Sayton, well muffled in wrappings, issued quietly from the ladies' entrance of the hotel, and stood in the street.

The girl shuddered, as the driving wind tore viciously by her, and as the scurrying snow-flakes

struck her rudely in the face. But, hesitating only a moment, she gathered her skirts around her, and strode away up the street bravely, in the face of the storm. Ere long she stood at the box-office of the theater.

"We have only *one* good seat in the house, miss, which is vacant, and that is in the orchestra, front row," said the agent, respectfully.

"Give it me," said the girl.

In a moment she had passed the green doors, and stood in the crowded auditorium of the theater.

She heeded not the basilisk eyes of a tall man fastened upon her, as she hurried on.

That man, however, started violently, and drew back.

As the young lady took her seat, the curtain went up, on the first scene of the thrilling play; and there in the aisle stood the tall man, with his keen eyes still bent on her.

Then Sadie saw *him*!

CHAPTER IV.

"HAWKSHAW, THE DETECTIVE."

SADIE SAYTON glanced at the tall, fine-looking man, who, at a sign from the usher, had now seated himself on one of the steps, only two seats from the young girl.

A strange fascination seemed to hang around this stranger; at all events, something seemed to impel Sadie to look at him covertly. His face was one wondrously familiar to her; and with it, there came to the girl a black memory—a memory which time and circumstances had almost blotted out.

Sadie started as she saw the burning eyes of the man fastened upon her, and she turned her crimsoning face away. She could not drive out of her mind those wicked eyes, so lingering, so yearning, nor forget that insinuating smile which played over the bearded face of him who sat so near her; and her mind was still traveling back.

Could it be he?

But the girl turned resolutely away; and then slowly the blush which had mantled her cheek faded out.

Suddenly, Hawkshaw, the detective, in blonde wig and auburn whiskers, entered upon the scene at the tap-room. When he spoke, in a rich, full voice, telling his suspicions of some of the parties before him, Sadie Sayton started violently, and bent her eyes upon the speaker.

Her ears seemed to drink in every word that fell from the actor's lips. A strange shade of doubt, of anxiety, spread over her face; and, unheeding every thing around her, she leaned her head forward, and listened intently.

The play proceeded. Then Hawkshaw strolled listlessly off the stage; and, at last, poor Agnes Hope, in the character of *Emily St. Evermond*, appeared. Then *she* was gone, and the act-drop went down for the first time.

So intense had been Sadie's interest that, oblivious to all her surroundings, she gazed upon the curtain long after the actors had disappeared. Then, with a long-drawn sigh and a half-sob, she recovered her self-possession, and turned around to find the basilisk eyes of the stranger fixed upon her.

For a moment she eyed him steadily, but turned away half in alarm.

Then the bell sounded—the whistle echoed behind the scenes, and the act-drop rolled up again.

But in this scene neither *Hawkshaw* nor *Emily St. Evermond* appeared.

We will, for a moment, go behind the curtain, and note a *life-scene* enacting there.

Between two of the shifts, on the left, stood Hawkshaw and the girl, Emily.

They were waiting their turn to "go on."

Robbed of their cast-names, we recognize them as Frank Hayworth and Agnes Hope. Despite the disguise he wore, it was easy to see that the young man's face was overclouded by a sorrowful, painful expression. But, as yet, he had not spoken. Agnes was looking at him wonderingly, lovingly.

"Well, Frank?" she said, in a low, sweet voice, and her eyes beamed warmly on him.

The actor understood that look, and taking the girl's hand gently in his, while his fine eyes rested pityingly on her face—that face so unnatural—so ghastly to him in the thickly-spread *rouge* of the character she was playing—he said:

"I wanted to see you, Agnes, for a moment, on business—*serious* business, Agnes;" and he paused.

"Serious business, Frank? And with me? Well, go on, Frank," and the poor girl bent her head, as a crimsoning blush reddened still more her unnaturally-colored face, and a perceptible thrill shook her frail frame.

"Life is very uncertain, Agnes," he began, in a low voice—scarcely, indeed, above a whisper.

"What mean you, Frank?" asked the girl suddenly, a deadly pallor overspreading her painted face, as a hideous thought flashed with the speed of lightning through her brain.

Frank Hayworth did not reply at once; but he gently pressed the thin, cold hand, lying so confidently in his own stronger palm. He knew that the girl's eyes were fastened eagerly upon him. So, in a tremulous voice, he said:

"Your mother is—"

"What, Frank? Has any thing happened?" and she clutched him with all her energy, and gazed wildly at him with her great, staring black eyes.

"Be calm, Agnes; control yourself, and listen to me. Time flies, and I must be brief. Your mother is ill, Agnes—*very* ill. The doctor was to see her not an hour since, and—be brave, Agnes!—he says, *she can not live through the night*. There, there, Agnes; be strong, my poor girl, and—I have to 'go on' now!"

He placed her gently in a seat—there in the silence and gloom between the gaudily-painted scenes—and in a moment more, the young man sauntered again upon the stage, as Hawkshaw, the Detective.

The play went on, increasing in intensity, scene by scene, act by act, and Sadie Sayton, more dreaming than waking, sat still and watched him who played the part of Hawkshaw.

Absorbed in the thrilling play—absorbed especially in the noble fellow who played the detective's role—Sadie paid but little heed to the man who so persistently, so impertinently watched her every movement.

The climax of the drama was fast approaching—the act-drop had rolled up for the last time.

Poor Agnes Hope, now as *Mrs. Green Jones*, pirouetted glibly with her stage-struck husband, the vender of veal pies; and not one in the house, save Frank Hayworth, who watched her with sad, sympathizing eyes, knew the terrible sorrow in her bosom.

Then the slides were shifted for the last time, and its closing scene revealed *Jem Dalton* and *Melter Moss* on their burglarious errand, and, following them like a bloodhound *Hawkshaw*, the *Detective*.

Then the final struggle—then the victory of the detective; and the house rung with thundering plaudits, as in the contest, the wig and beard of the gallant Hawkshaw were inadvertently and unintentionally torn away, and the face of Frank Hayworth, enthusiastic, triumphant and glowing, stood forth in the full glare of the footlights!

But, amid the wild cheers and clapping of hands, there went up from among the orchestra-seats a long, wailing cry.

Sadie Sayton had gazed in the face of Frank Hayworth; and in the actor's shirt-bosom, the girl had caught the sparkle and dazzle of a diamond of the first water.

Then the curtain went down.

Slowly the theater was emptied; the lights were being extinguished; but Sadie Sayton, her brain reeling, her limbs faltering, remained. Near her, silent, watchful as a hawk, stood the bearded stranger.

The girl leaned down, and searched all around

her. An exclamation of vexation escaped her lips.

"I have lost it! *His* gift!"

In a moment the man drew near her.

"Can I assist you, miss? Have you dropped anything?" And he bowed low before her.

"I have lost a ring, sir; a ring with a ruby setting. I value it highly." And again she bent down in the search.

The gentleman at once busied himself, likewise, in looking for the lost article.

Suddenly a sparkle at his feet caught his eye. In a moment he had covered the object lightly with his boot; and then, as the girl was looking in another direction, he stooped, picked up the object, and in the twinkling of an eye, transferred it to his pocket.

"I am sorry, miss; but I fear the ring is lost—for the time, at least," he said; "but I will cause search for it, and if found, will see that you get it."

The girl pondered for a moment. She was loth to leave the ring; it had never been from her finger since that dark evening long ago, when Allan Hill put it there.

But, she saw that almost everybody had gone; so, with a deep sigh, she turned and attempted to move off.

She had miscalculated her strength; for, exhausted with the constant strain upon her mind, startled at the loud, strong voice of the man who played Hawkshaw; shocked at the unexpected discovery; depressed at the loss of the ring; frightened at the familiar face of the stranger, with its dark memories, she learned soon enough that her vigor was gone.

She tottered and sunk back on a seat. The man near her strode forward and took her gently by the hand.

"Allow me to assist you hence, miss; they are closing the house," he said.

The girl rallied, staggered to her feet, and shrinking away from his proffered aid, reeled along the aisle, out through the green doors, into the lobby.

The man hung pertinaciously behind her.

Suddenly Sadie paused, and facing him, said, in a low, unsteady voice:

"Pardon me, sir; but we have met before, I think?" And she raised her eyes fearfully to his face.

"You are right, Sadie Sayton!" he said, promptly.

"You and I *have* met before; and, methinks, you have met that ranting actor, too! But, if it be tidings for you, I'll tell you that he is to be married to that white-faced, sickly-looking girl who played *Mrs. Green Jones* to-night. Ha! ha!"

A long, wailing, heart-bursting cry from the poor maiden, and, flinging her arms up wildly in the air, she tottered and fell backward.

But Willis Wildfern, the man-about-town, caught the fainting form of Sadie Sayton in his ready arms.

CHAPTER V.

THE DAMNING PROOF.

THE cold blast, rudely blowing in from the street, fanned the throbbing temples of Sadie Sayton; and the blinding snow struck her full in the face, as she lay, limp and helpless in the arms of Wildfern.

The man gloated over her beauteous face and form; and a devilish luster—a wicked look of triumph—gleamed in his eye. He and Sadie Sayton—the girl between him and whom was an old-time link of some sort—were alone in that dark, cold entrance, into which the snow-storm was beating. The box-agent was just extinguishing his light, and the night-watchman was coming up the steps.

"Hullo! what's this, mister?" he asked, sternly, as he saw dimly the form of a woman, locked in the arms of a tall, bearded man.

"No harm, my good fellow," replied Wildfern. "Only a girl fainted from the close air; but she will soon come round, and I'll see her safe home."

The watchman said nothing more, but casting a suspicious glance at Wildfern, passed on into the booth of the theater.

The man-about-town drew the limp form closer to him in his steady grasp; he felt her warm breath

faintly upon his bearded face. He suddenly bent his head over her—his lips were almost touching those of the innocent, unconscious maiden, when suddenly a shiver passed over the girl.

Her eyes opened; she staggered to her feet, and, summoning her strength, she uttered a low cry and darted into the street.

Willis Wildfern strode after her, and both were quickly lost in the stormy night.

In a half-minute Sadie stood at the corner of Twelfth street. She paused as if shot, for, at that instant, two forms—one a tall man, the other a slender woman—the latter clinging to the arm of the former—passed by swiftly, going down Twelfth street.

And Sadie had heard a well-known voice say:

"Be brave, be hopeful, Agnes! We will *pray* for the best; but if the worst is to be realized, look to me, Agnes—trust me always, and, God be my judge! I will not desert you."

And then the two were across Chestnut street, and out of ear-shot.

Sadie Sayton gazed after them with a wild, meaningless stare, as they crossed Chestnut street. For an instant she clung to an awning-post for support.

"Fate bids me on! I must see the end of this. I *must* learn if he is true or false to me! I must follow on, whithersoever they lead! Oh, God! and he my idol! I must—"

The remainder of this sentence was lost, as the girl strode away down Twelfth street, keeping in sight those whom she followed, and who were now far ahead.

Willis Wildfern chuckled low to himself.

"Ha! ha!" he said, in a low tone of triumph, "I'm in luck; and I'll turn this little circumstance to good account! I must own that girl. I must have her money—*real* stuff! And, Mr. Frank Hayworth, look to yourself, for I am on your track—a firebrand in my hand! And the link between this dazzling beauty and the vagrant player? I'll learn it yet, for I have the ring. Strange things may have happened since 1861. Well, we'll see! And she a perfect Hebe still! Ye gods! And now I'll hold on to this prize until she consents, by fair means or foul, to be my wife! Lucky dog that I am, that circumstances should thus befriend me! And I can and will yet win her, or she is proof to devotion and flattery, and is different from the great majority of her sex. I'll follow on and see the end of this *farce*—a proper conclusion to the evening's entertainment. By Jove! the girl is in earnest, and—why, it'll be the same!"

Speaking thus, the man hurried along swiftly behind Sadie—now a considerable distance in advance.

Frank Hayworth and Agnes hastened on their way. They heeded not the wild storm which was raging around them.

At length they reached Catharine street, far away, and turned up at once to the right. Hurrying on a few moments, they paused suddenly before a low, dilapidated house, which, from its appearance, had borne the brunt of many storms.

A light gleamed from a window near the top of the house; with this exception, the lowly habitation was in gloom.

In a moment the door was opened, and the actor and his charge disappeared inside.

Sadie Sayton, hanging close behind, had watched them keenly. Her feet were cold and numb; her hands almost pulseless.

As she saw the two walkers halt before the old habitation, she likewise paused, shrinking away in the deep, drifted snow, under the dark shadows of the house nearest her. And when they whom she watched disappeared from view, the lonely girl heaved a deep sigh, and was about to turn off.

Just then she saw, on the opposite side of the street, the reflection of light from the window of the old house. In that reflected glimmer she beheld spectral shadows moving about. Waiting not a moment, she hurried across the street.

At that instant a long, piercing wail rung out from the old house, and Sadie, glancing up, saw distinctly him who had played Hawkshaw holding a girl in his arms.

And then Sadie Sayton sunk swooning in the snow.

Another moment and the tall form of Willis Wildfern towered over her.

CHAPTER VI.

A LEAF FROM AN OLD BOOK.

ON the banks of the James river, in the county of Charles City, Virginia, embowered in the midst of a spreading grove of oaks, stood the storm-stained mansion of old Colonel Manton Sayton—the house known for years as Sayton Manor.

Colonel Sayton, the possessor of the manor—at the time we have chosen for our story—had well maintained the prestige of his family. And though in his day, too, clouds had lowered over him, yet those clouds had now blown away, and he was happy that he again lived in the old mansion—happy in the company of his charming daughter Sadie—the link which bound him tenderly to the memory of his dead wife, sleeping in the quiet grave-yard in the garden; happy as he passed his time on the spreading farm, and in the quiet precincts of the old manor.

Sadie, his child, was pretty as a nymph, warm-hearted, whole-souled, well-educated, joyous and light-hearted, devotedly fond of her father, heeding his slightest wish, considering it a heinous sin if she failed to please him in the slightest particular.

Living about a mile from the manor, and further down the river, was another family—one as old and as proud as that of the Saytons; but it was, in one sense, what might be termed a "broken-down" family.

Hugh Hill, the owner of this farm, dated his ancestry far back in the dead ages, and found his family-name in the landed gentry of England. At one time he had been rich; but, fox-hunting, a reckless

Then the old man determined to turn over a new leaf—to start life again. But just as his resolves were formed, the hollow tones of the tocsin of war echoed through the land, and the red brand of battle crimsoned the sky.

At that time his only child, a son, Allan by name, was absent at William-and-Mary college. The old gentleman was determined that his darling boy should have a good education, already knowing that, were the debts, fast accumulating on the old farm, paid off, he could give Allan nothing else than an education.

Between the two families living so near together, there was no cordiality—no friendship—as might reasonably have been expected. An old feud, dating back for several generations, divided them, and made the two representatives of the families scowl at one another, when, by chance, they met. Disregard of money, and a lavish hospitality, had made a serious inroad into his treasury.

The BLACK WAVE was sweeping over the land, and Allan Hill was suddenly summoned home from college. By a great effort his father had raked together an amount sufficient to defray the expenses of the completion of his son's education abroad, and the young man was to go at once.

We will not dwell here; we are writing simply a love-story—not a war-chronicle—and we'll hasten on.

It cannot be supposed that Sadie Sayton and Allan Hill had never met. This was almost an impossibility, taking into consideration the surrounding circumstances.

The two young folks, despite the enmity existing between the families, had met, and—long ago; Sadie Sayton certainly reigned in Allan Hill's bosom as queen of love and beauty. The youth madly worshiped the girl, and it was easy for him to see that his love was reciprocated.

Then came the impulsive proposal—the mad appeal. Then the sudden starting, the vicious crimsoning; then the warm, outgushing woman's love; then the half-articulate "YES!"

And then the old story of the quarrel.

But they cared not for this.

Allan Hill and Sadie Sayton were engaged to be married in the year 1861—secretly, of course. But then, there grew up between them a high wall—a barrier which seemed to sunder them forever.

Colonel Sayton frowned, and his face grew as black as midnight, when one day Allan Hill boldly appeared at the manor and asked to see Sadie. Strange to say, he did see the girl; but when he called again with "unblushing front," as the colonel termed it, he failed to see Sadie.

The old gentleman himself met the young man, and told him plainly never again to darken his doors, and that he would not countenance him there, as long as the memory of past events remained with him.

With anger swelling in his bosom, and fire flashing from his eyes, Allan Hill had turned, and without reply soever, left the mansion, mounted his horse and galloped away.

But he had not forgotten Sadie, or turned his back upon her. He still found means of communicating with her, and they met frequently—clandestinely, of course.

Then Allan Hill went to Europe.

About this time a stranger made his appearance at Sayton Manor. By education, at least, he was evidently a gentleman; and his dress and deportment also pointed him out as such. The young man—he was young, and a tall, fine-looking fellow, too—had come down, so he said, on a boat from Richmond, on a hunting expedition. Having missed the returning steamer, he applied at the mansion, late that day, for hospitality. He was not refused; his appearance was, with the colonel, a guarantee of respectability.

This young man and Sadie Sayton met. In an instant, as if by instinct, the girl knew that *his* heart had bounded at her presence.

Women soon learn this. Maybe by magic.

She was not mistaken; for, before the stranger took his departure next day, he had managed to convey to Sadie, most unmistakably, proofs of his admiration. But the girl repelled him with coldness, especially when the stranger made close and impertinent inquiries into the pecuniary affairs of her father.

In a week from that time the young man came again—this time arrayed in all the elegance of fashion.

As the stranger's political views agreed with the colonel's—which had been learned in the former visit—his visit, though taking the old Virginian by surprise, was nevertheless not distasteful to him.

Not so with Sadie; she trembled violently as she saw the man walking up the wharfway toward the house. She had a foreboding of evil—that evil connected with this man—and to befall herself. But she met him with an inborn dignity peculiar to her, though her manner was frigidly distant and reserved.

The stranger remained a week, and in that time—without the colonel's knowledge or consent—managed to pay formal court and address to the girl.

Sadie was thunderstruck and shrunk frightened away. But she refused him point-blank, and expressed her indignation at his course. The man was stung to fury, and used harsh, insulting language.

The girl was about to scream for help, but the fellow placed his hand over her mouth, and put a pistol to her head, making her promise to reveal nothing until he had gone.

More dead than alive Sadie Sayton had sunk back into a swoon. When she awoke to consciousness the stranger had gone.

And then Sadie tremblingly told her father all. The old man's rage was ungovernable. The very next day he went to Richmond—taking especial

pains before he left home to stick a brace of old-fashioned dueling pistols in his carpet-bag.

But the next morning he returned from a fruitless errand. The stranger had left Richmond.

At that time Sadie was not quite sixteen. And the name the stranger gave was Willis Wildfern.

Then the hideous BLACK WAVE of civil war, which had come so suddenly, finally rolled away, and Colonel Sayton was still the owner of his old mansion; he was soon again surrounded by plenty.

Not so, however, with Hugh Hill. He had died suddenly some time before, and his ancient residence had been burned by a band of raiding horsemen.

At last, after a long absence abroad, Allan Hill came home, crushed in spirits at the death of his father; and when he reached the old farm, he found himself homeless, and almost without a penny.

Time passed. Allan and Sadie met again. They were still true to each other; but, that barrier already erected in the past, had grown broader and higher between them. For Allan Hill had soon sold the old farm lands, and with the proceeds paid his father's debts. This left him poverty-stricken.

Between the young man and Colonel Sayton there was a cold reserve, a tacit declaration of war which was unmistakable.

Colonel Sayton was a proud old man—an *unjust* old man. He was not exactly *mean*, nor can we say that he regarded money as the *sole* guaranty for worth. Yet, remembering the way in which Allan Hill had lost his property, the old gentleman grew extremely serious as the young man—at last entirely disregarding him and his commands—continued his visits to Sadie. Then the father hinted to his daughter that the young fellow's visits were distasteful to *him*.

But, this time Sadie paid no heed to her father's words. Then the old gentleman got very angry, and peremptorily bade the girl discard her lover.

Then Sadie Sayton's eyes flashed fire, as she openly avowed her undying love for Allan Hill.

Colonel Sayton was almost dumbfounded at this, though he answered not a word; but, when the young man came again, the stern old father met him ere he alighted from his horse.

The words they spoke were few. Colonel Sayton telling Allan, angrily, never again to put foot in his house, *until he could keep a bank account*. Young Hill retorted that the day would come when the Colonel *would welcome him to his proud old mansion*.

Then they parted.

The dark night following this altercation, Allan Hill stood on the wharf awaiting the arrival of the "John Sylvester." By his side was Sadie Sayton. He slipped upon her finger a ring with a ruby-setting; she pinned in his shirt-front a diamond scarf-pin.

Then the steamer's lights were in sight. Ten minutes later Allan Hill had parted from the girl he loved, stepped aboard the steamer, and was gone into the world to make that which would enable him—to *keep a bank account*.

CHAPTER VII.

BY A DEATH-BED.

FRANK HAYWORTH's heart beat fast as, with Agnes Hope hanging on his arm, he paused at the foot of the rickety stairway to allow the poor girl time to get her breath. The young man heard the labored breathing struggling from the panting bosom; he felt the thin arm dragging so heavily, so tremulously, on his, and he knew that the maiden was exhausted.

So for a moment he lingered at the foot of the stairway, in the gloomy, unlit passage, and supporting the fainting form of the girl in his strong grasp, he waited until she had, in a measure, recovered from her tedious walk through the snow.

As they stood there silently, in the dark passage, no sound breaking the perfect quiet, save the sad, hollow shriekings of the wind, moaning around the

corners and under the eaves of the old house, suddenly a faint, half-gurgling groan echoed feebly from the room above. Then again and again. And then a fluttering voice was heard speaking in tremulous tones.

And then the half-subdued, 'yet heavy footsteps withal of a man shook the room as he walked across the floor.

Agnes Hope rallied herself, and summoning a sudden energy, said, in a low voice:

"Come—come, Frank! We *must* go! 'Tis mother, and—and—we may be too late. Come!"

The young man strove not to keep her; but he whispered in her ear:

"Again, Agnes, I *beg* you to be brave, and to remember that I am your friend to death! Now, Agnes, lean on me, and come along. And be prepared, my poor girl, for the worst. There—there—Agnes, do not tremble so; trust in God, and rely on my friendship!"

So speaking, Frank Hayworth, almost lifting the girl in his arms, commenced the ascent of the stairs. In a moment the top was reached.

And that moment the door of the front room was opened, and the robust form of the kind-hearted physician stood there in the broad flash of light streaming from the apartment.

And then another gurgling groan echoed in the silent air.

Agnes Hope trembled as, leaning on the actor's arm, she panted heavily.

"Is it you, Agnes?" asked the doctor, in a low voice, as he peered into the gloom. His voice was subdued—just above a whisper, and, in his tones, there was something of sympathy.

"Yes, doctor," replied the girl; "it is I. I am with Mr. Hayworth." As she spoke she came forward into the light.

"I am glad you are here, Agnes, my child," said the physician in the same kind tone. "Be not cast down, my poor girl, but come in and see your mother. You have no time to lose."

So saying, the humane gentleman took Agnes by the hand, and beckoning the young man to follow, led the girl into the humble room.

Relinquishing the hand of Agnes, the physician stepped lightly to the mantle, and took therefrom a glass containing a fluid. He leaned over the bed of the dying woman, and placed his hands gently upon her arm.

"Arouse, Mrs. Hope, and drink this potion; Agnes is here;" and then he lifted her head gently, as he placed the liquid to her lips.

Without hesitating, the sufferer swallowed the invigorating draught.

In a moment the fiery liquid had flashed through her sinking frame—the eyes lost their strong stare—the hands unclenched their grasp, and the panting breath came more regularly.

Turning her eyes wearily on the physician, the dying woman murmured in a low voice, incoherently—unmeaningly:

"Agnes! Agnes! did you say, doctor? No! Agnes is not here; she is at the play-house, laughing and jesting on the boards! She is *Emily St. Evermond*, to-night. And then—ha! ha! She afterward marries *Green Jones*, you know! She told me all about it, and how her heart would ache, when remembering her old mother all alone at home. She would have to go on the stage, and laugh and smirk, and say silly things to please the people! Poor—poor Agnes! But, she is not here, doctor, and— Ha! doctor, I am dying, doctor, and Agnes, my child—away!"

As she spoke a wild shudder swept over her frame, and with a startled look of sudden fright, she closed her eyes.

The physician had allowed her to rattle on in her wild, random talk, without attempting to check; but, as soon as she ceased speaking of her own accord, he quickly placed his sensitive finger over the thrilling artery of the neck. Then, as a painful look spread over his face, he beckoned Agnes to him, and

leaning down, half-shouted in the ear of the dying woman:

"Arouse yourself! arouse yourself, for your daughter's sake! Agnes is here to bid you farewell!"

But the poor woman gave no reply. At the name of Agnes there was a faint quivering about the nostril, a just perceptible lifting of the thin upper lip. Then a terrible shiver passed over her frame—then another, and another—then a long, feebly-drawn breath.

The physician turned away.

"DEAD!" he said, in a voice almost inaudible.

Then came the long, wailing shriek, as poor Agnes reeled back, and fell in the ready arms of Frank Hayworth.

At that moment the window-sash was shaken, and a wild laugh rung in the room.

Frank Hayworth glanced thitherward and saw a hideous face.

In an instant the face was gone.

CHAPTER VIII.

SOMETHING SERIOUS INTERRUPTED.

FOR a moment Wildfern gazed triumphantly at the quarry he had hunted down—the poor girl lying so motionless in the snow.

Then he stooped down and pressed to her nostrils a handkerchief saturated with an ether. Then, calling a passing carriage, he lifted the girl in his arms, bore her to the vehicle, and whispering a few words to the driver, sprung in and away they jolted.

The carriage dashed on as rapidly as possible over the snow-covered streets. The driver plied his whip vigorously—perhaps he knew the man who had employed him, well enough; this man paid well!

The carriage rumbled on. At length Locust street was reached.

Turning abruptly around the corner, the driver lashed his horses again, and rattled on at a greater speed than ever. Proceeding a few squares, the vehicle suddenly paused before a large double house on the north side. A light burned in the hallway of the dwelling, despite the late hour.

The driver did not stir from his box.

Willis Wildfern reached out his hand and opened the door. Then, grasping the form of Sadie Sayton in his arms, he sprung out.

"Here, my man," he said, handing a note of considerable amount to the driver; "this for your speed. And, mark you well—you know me!—you have only been to the Baltimore depot to-night!"

"Exactly, captain; I know my business."

The man touched his horses, and again the carriage jolted away. Turning into a neighboring cross-street, it was soon out of sight and hearing.

Wildfern, bearing the insensible girl in his arms, sprung up the broad marble steps, and applying his hand to the bell pulled vigorously three times.

Instantly the light glowing in the hall and shimmering through the transom-light over the door, was subdued. Then, hurrying feet echoed along the passage. But, though a hand was placed upon the knob inside, yet the door opened not, nor did the knob turn. A faint, peculiar rap, however, sounded on the panel.

Willis Wildfern immediately answered this. Then another rap sounded on the door. The man's face wrinkled into a frown; but he returned the rap.

At last the door was opened; but even then it was caught by a short check-chain.

"Who comes?" asked a voice.

"It is I, Lady Maud," replied Wildfern, angrily.

"Open at once and let me in out of the storm."

Then the door was closed for a moment; a chain rattled. Then the door swung open.

"Wildfern entered with his burden and glanced around him.

"Ha! what's this, Willis Wildfern? What dark purpose do you now entertain?" asked the woman harshly, though she gave way for the man to enter as she spoke.

The other made a sudden, imperative gesture. The woman understood it, for she half-cowered, and then quickly shut the door.

"Mind your tongue, Lady Maud!" replied Wildfern, angrily, as he drew aside the saturated handkerchief, and let the light fall on the lovely face of the girl. "But, look at this beauty!" he continued. "Did you ever see one fairer, eh?"

"Wondrously fair!" exclaimed the woman, involuntarily. "But, where did you find the poor thing, captain, and what are you going to do with the child? I hope—"

"Enough, Lady Maud; but now, come help me in with her. Then, maybe, I'll tell you all about it. You must keep her here for me."

The woman started, but, meeting the man's eye, bowed silently, saying nothing. They passed on, and entered a brilliantly-lit parlor to the left—the man still carrying the girl in his arms. Then he laid her on a sofa. But he did not explain her insensible condition.

He whispered to the other.

"What now, captain?" and she stirred not.

"Do as I tell you—at once, too!" growled the man.

"I tell you, Wildfern, I do not wish—"

"Go, Lady Maud! Do you brave me thus?" and he put his hand menacingly in his bosom.

The woman turned at once and left the room. In a few moments she was back.

She carried in her hands a large silk handkerchief, and a few feet of cord. But, her face was wrinkled darkly.

A moment and the handkerchief was tied loosely though securely over the girl's head. Then her soft wrists were bound with the cord. Between them, at once, the man and the woman bore the limp form along the dimly-lit hall—thence up stairs, out of sight.

Some ten minutes elapsed before the two returned.

Wildfern opened a door to the right of the passage, and entered a room as if he was perfectly at home. The woman followed him.

The apartment into which they entered was fitted up with a tasteful, costly elegance. Full-length mirrors reached from the ceiling to the richly-carpeted floor.

Paintings of wondrous tinting and shading—though perhaps rather broad in subject—adorned the walls. The atmosphere of the room was warm and genial.

"You certainly have comfort here, Lady Maud, thanks to—me!" said the man.

"Thanks to our handy way of providing money, you had better say, my dear captain. And you know I am not altogether unserviceable. If I owe you any thing I endeavor to pay it back by showing that I am grateful. Besides that, captain," and she sunk her voice to a whisper, as a glitter came to her eye, "I am well aware what a word from me would do! I would have but to breathe a single sentence, in the ear of a certain official about town, and you and Wild Tom would—"

"There! Enough, Lady Maud! you trifle with me—you threaten me, and there's no necessity," interrupted the man, starting. "More than that, my noble lady, if you are inclined, go ahead! You will be cutting your own throat. Ha! ha! And should you fail in doing that, you may as well remember that I am no pigmy, and can do certain things myself!"

These words were spoken fiercely and with a deep significance: and, as he uttered the last syllable, the man thrust his right hand into the breast-pocket of his coat.

The Lady Maud shuddered, and her ruddy face blanched as the words fell upon her ear. But she rallied and said laughingly:

"I did but joke, captain, and if I meant any thing, it was, that I do for you what would be a fair equivalent for the money you advance me. But," and her voice became serious, as if a sudden remembrance had flashed through her brain, "please remember,

my friend, that I hold *more than one secret of yours!* I am not easily frightened, Willis Wildfern, nor am I a child to deal with. I think *this* much can be matched against yours!" and, as she spoke, she flexed her right arm, and touched the swelling muscle with the tips of the fingers of her left hand.

The man drew back. He knew the Lady Maud of old; he knew that she was *not* to be trifled with, and that when her anger was thoroughly aroused, she was a dangerous woman to deal with—one who could take her own part, be it at cut-and-thrust or fisticuff.

"We will not quarrel, Lady Maud! Above all others, you and I should be friends. But, remember well: you hold me no tighter than I hold you—for I saw the blow given that night, late—"

"Ah! And did I not, Willis Wildfern, in this very house, see other blows given? Did I not see a *bleeding, ghastly body carried down those stairs there?* Ah! well you may shudder! And can not the old covered well in the yard tell a secret? Ay! between you and Wild Tom—"

"Stop, woman, or by heavens, I'll make you!" And as he uttered those angry words in a low, hissing voice, the man sprung to his feet, and drew from his bosom a long, keen knife. In a moment he advanced toward the other.

But the Lady Maud was not slow in meeting his attack. Like lightning she was upon her feet; and then the blue, highly-tempered barrel of a pistol flashed in the room, and the woman's finger was pressing the creaking trigger.

The man paused; then suddenly he stooped for a spring, and—

At that moment the door-bell sounded sharp and clear through the quiet mansion.

CHAPTER IX.

A STARTLING SIGHT.

BUT the hideous face disappeared quickly from the window; and then the snow whirled down furiously against the filmy panes. The wind roared around the old house, and sighed and moaned along the streets, and up the alleys.

Frank Hayworth had started when his eyes fell upon the dark, scowling, diabolical face at the window. And then a frown wrinkled his brow.

Laying the swooning girl gently upon an old lounge, the young man sprung to the window, flung up the rickety sash, and, leaning forth, peered out into the thick gloom.

Far down the street, dimly showing, the form of a man was speeding away. Then it had gone from sight.

Frank Hayworth looked below. He started as he saw the old shutter to a window of a story under him swinging to and fro. In an instant he knew how the bold intruder had clambered up.

The young man lowered the sash at once, and turned again into the room.

The physician, who had been leaning over the girl, now arose, and putting on his overcoat, picked up his hat and gloves. Then he drew near to Frank Hayworth, and said, in an undertone:

"I am of no further use, sir; but, somebody must stay here with the poor girl to-night. How can it be arranged?"

The actor pondered for a moment; but, then looking up suddenly, said, quietly:

"I can arrange it, doctor; I will stay myself."

For an instant the physician glanced at him who spoke; in that glance was something—however faint—of suspicion.

"Can you not get some other person too—a woman—Mr. Hayworth? Agnes Hope is a young girl; and you two all alone in this old house. Why, people will—"

"I understand you, doctor," interrupted the other, sternly. "Let me assure you, I love Agnes Hope only as—as—a sister, and as such would respect and defend her."

The shade of suspicion passed from the physician's face, and he answered:

"You have a good heart, Mr. Hayworth, and you will be rewarded! And, now, please attend to the funeral arrangements, at your earliest convenience. We are the only friends the poor girl has, and we must not desert her. And, yes, the funeral had better be as soon as possible."

"Exactly, doctor. To-morrow afternoon, under the circumstances, will not be too soon, I think. What say you?"

"I will do; and I will be here then. And, Mr. Hayworth," the physician sunk his voice still lower as he spoke, "if—if—there is any thing in the shape of money—why, sir, my purse is—"

"God bless you, doctor! I have some means myself, and Agnes has her wages. But, should we need any thing, we will not scruple to take advantage of your kind offer."

"Then, good-night, sir," replied the physician, shaking the actor's hand. "I must now be going; I will see you to-morrow."

Turning at once, the humane gentleman said a soft, sympathizing good-night to Agnes, and in a moment more had disappeared.

Frank Hayworth and Agnes Hope were left alone in the chamber of death.

The young man gazed for a moment at the girl in silence; then, recovering himself, walked to the lounge on which she sat, and taking her hand gently in his, said:

"You must sleep, Agnes; you are wearied and faint. Sit in the chair there for a moment, and I will wheel the lounge into the next room and arrange it for you. Do not object. I can do it, and you *must* sleep, or you'll be sick yourself. There, sit down," he said, as the girl, after feebly objecting, arose to her feet, and sat down in the chair near the bed.

Frank Hayworth at once pushed the lounge from the chamber into the neighboring room. He was absent but a few moments when he returned softly, and said:

"'Tis ready, Agnes; now go in and sleep. I will remain here all night, and watch."

Without replying, but with a look of deep gratitude, Agnes Hope arose, and walked into the next room.

Then Frank Hayworth, his hands behind him, his face serious with thought, began to promenade slowly the limits of the carpetless floor.

The actor paused as a shudder swept over his frame. A feeling of awe, which he could not drive away, crept apace over Frank Hayworth as he paused there, and, bending his head, listened to the wild storm raging without.

Involuntarily he turned and glanced at the ghastly object on the bed.

A look of very horror sprung to his face as he saw what was revealed.

The young man looked again.

Uttering a half-cry of fright, and while his eyes seemed to start from their sockets—his tongue cleaving to his mouth—his forehead bathed in sudden sweat—his face blanched—his nostrils quivering, Frank Hayworth staggered wildly back, and clutching in the air for support, sunk with a moan upon a chair.

CHAPTER X.

AT TONY'S.

WILLIS WILDFERN paused as the startling jingle of the bell rung in the room.

Glaring at the angry woman who stood before him, he placed his knife slowly out of sight, and said:

"It was very well, Lady Maud, that we were interrupted in our little game! Perhaps when we can spare our services to one another, we can take up the battle again; but not now. You are useful to me as I am to you. So put up your pistol, and we'll

be friends. But hark you, Lady Maud! please forget *old things* for the future; it is best for the health of both of us!"

The woman half-sneered, as she replied:

"Be it as you say, Captain Willis! But all I wish you to understand is, that I hold you as tightly by the throat as you do me; and that I am well able and always prepared to defend myself. But, as you say, we'll be friends now. Wait a moment until I answer the bell. Ha! there it is again; and whoever pulls it is in earnest."

As she spoke, she placed the pistol back in her bosom, and casting a half-suspicious glance at Wildfern, turned abruptly and opened the door leading into the passageway.

The man gazed after with a scowl; but his face suddenly lighted up with a smile, and he chuckled low to himself, as he muttered:

"I must propitiate the old tigress! For I have *game* in her keeping! I have a wife in sight! And gold—*her* gold! It shall pay me in full! Yes, I *was* born under a lucky star, and—"

Just then the door-bolt turned, and the Lady Maud re-entered the apartment, a frown upon her face.

"You are wanted, captain; trouble is in the wind!" she said, at once, flinging herself into a chair, and glancing at the man she addressed.

Wildfern's face grew white.

"Well, what is it, Lady Maud?"

"The *presses* are in danger! Wild Tom is at the door; *he* brings the news."

"The devil! Let him come in, and—"

"Let Wild Tom come in! Are you crazy, Willis Wildfern? I am a match for either of you, singly, but I'll not trust you both together."

Wildfern did not answer; but turning, he left the room, and hastened to the front door. He was gone several minutes.

When he returned, his face was wrinkled into a fresh frown of vexation, and an anxious expression shone in his every feature.

"I must be gone, Lady Maud, and at once," he said, hurriedly; "Tom's intelligence is important; the 'office' must be moved, and to-night. Confound the bad luck! I thought if there was a safe place in Philadelphia, we had found it."

"Where now will you go, captain?" asked the woman.

"To our same old place, I suppose: the vault at Laurel Hill. That is safe at all events; but it is inconveniently far, and Tom dislikes the place. He is superstitious, and is fond of seeing a ghost or bogle about every other night in the week! But I'll keep him up to the work, or I'll cut his throat!"

Another moment, and, in company with a tall, gigantic negro, he was hurrying away toward Shippen street. Here they paused and glanced around them in every direction. Not a human being was in sight. The lusty guardians of the night were nowhere to be seen. Perhaps they had retreated before the storm, and were warming their chilled hands, against rules, in some neighboring groggery or restaurant?

"The coast is clear, Tom," said Wildfern, in a low voice. "We'll go to Tony's and chance. Then we can have a talk and arrange matters. I tell you, Tom, we must work to-night! and, if necessary, with edged tools!"

"Exactly, marse cap'n! I understands you, and I'm willing!"

"Well, then, come along; the night is passing, and such a night!"

So saying he hurried across the street, and, turning, proceeded up Shippen for some distance. At length the men paused before a low house, with a gloomy, dingy exterior. Not a light was visible, and from this fact, and the silent, deserted look it bore, it was fair to surmise that the dwelling was untenanted.

But, Willis Wildfern thought otherwise; for, glancing around him, he suddenly stopped, and brushed away the snow at his feet, until he came to some boards. It was the cellar-cap.

The man knelt down at once and placed his ear to a crevice in the planking. He smiled with a grim satisfaction as he arose to his feet.

He had heard sounds coming from the cellar.

"Tony is well patronized to-night, Tom; listen," said Wildfern.

Sure enough, in the lulls of the wind faint sounds of tinkling tumblers, and swell of songs and boisterous laughter could be heard.

And the negro smiled, too, as he said in reply:

"Yes, cap'n, I hears 'em! 'Tis all the better for us, if Tony *has* a large house. But, what if some of dem meddlesome policemen is down dar by the store!"

The other started and hesitated. The suggestion set him to thinking. He paused for a moment.

"You know, marse cap'n, we're known to most on 'em in our *working-gear*; and you knows, too, we can't go in dat cellar dressed in any thing else."

"You're right, Tom," said Wildfern, slowly. "But, we *must* go in there and fix our plans, for we can not go elsewhere at this time of night. So, come along. If worst comes—why, Tom, we've been in scrapes before. We'll trust to luck and muscle! Come!"

"All right, marse cap'n; go ahead; I can 'weed my row,' dat's sure!"

Wildfern again looked around him; but, as he saw no one, he turned at once and disappeared up a narrow alley, leading between the two adjoining houses.

The negro followed close behind him. Cautiously they felt their way along the cold, wet walls bordering the narrow passage. Then they stood in an open space—a small yard now covered with snow.

Wildfern, who seemed perfectly at home, did not pause, but crossing over to a back-building, rapped on a door.

His rap was a peculiar one. At first it awakened no response; but, on being repeated, the door was opened softly, and a pair of keen black eyes flashed out on those who knocked.

The light from within the room shone through the crevice made by opening the door, and revealed those who stood without. Then the door was opened wider, and a small, short, thick-set fellow, with jet-black hair and glittering eyes appeared.

"Ah! 'tis ze *capitaine*! I am very much please to see him. *Entrez, entrez, capitaine!*" and he gave way for the two to pass.

"Yes, Tony, 'tis I. Glad to see you. But, Tony, show us to my room—my comrade and I. Then we'll go down to the 'palace,'" and Wildfern, followed by Tom, pushed through the door into the more congenial atmosphere of indoors.

In a moment, however, they had passed through the room, and, still escorted by Tony, disappeared in the apartment beyond.

Several moments passed ere they came forth again; and when they did no one would have known them—at least, the white man.

They hurried, however, through the room which they had entered, and going on into a passage, disappeared down a dark stairway.

The "palace" of Tony, so called by Wildfern, was not a palace, as we would interpret the word. Far from it. It was nothing more than "groggery." A long counter, and back of it a flashing array of cheap glassware, with a background of dingy solferino paper, made that mythical temple—the bar. At this shrine stood at least a score of rough fellows, in every stage of dilapidation—some quaffing the four-penny glasses of liquor there dispensed; others bent over the counter, and asleep; others leaning against it for support.

The room seemed like a baker's oven; and, to add to the stench of the prevailing atmosphere, a dozen or so half-drunken creatures, seated around the red-hot stove, were regaling themselves with the pipe.

Willis Wildfern paid no heed to any one, but, followed by his stalwart companion, strode through the motley crowd to a table in a further corner of the

room. He sat down; his comrade did the same. Then Wildfern rapped loudly on the table. In a moment Tony, who had now come down to superintend affairs, was at the table.

"What will ze *capitaine* have?"

"Sh! sh! Tony. Be guarded. No 'captain' here," and Wildfern looked him sternly in the face.

"Ten thousand pardons, *monsieur le capi*—I mean, sir."

"Very good, Tony; don't forget. But, bring me brandy; and, hark you, my man, *good* brandy, or I'll make *you* drink it."

"Certainly—*certainement*, *cap*—sir! You are very droll! Ha! ha!" and with this the man hurried off.

He was gone but a few minutes when he returned, bringing the desired liquid.

"Here it is, sir; real Portuguese—*vraiment*!"

The man, Wildfern, took the bottle, and without placing any credit in Tony's words, took out the cork, and passed the vessel knowingly, backward and forward, beneath his nose for a moment.

"Good, Tony; for once you are right. Here's the score." As he spoke he drew from his pocket a bank-note and flung it upon the table.

The Frenchman picked up the money and glanced suspiciously at it.

"Good, Tony; good as gold."

"Yes, yes, *cap*—sir! If *you* say so."

"I *do* say so; and, Tony, keep the change," said Wildfern, as a satisfied look came over his face.

Then Tony hurried away again.

Pouring out a huge draught, Wildfern gulped it down without breathing; and then, with an approving smack of his lips, he shoved the bottle toward the other.

The negro helped himself bountifully likewise.

"Now, Tom, tell me all about this bad piece of business," said Wildfern; "it has annoyed me no little."

"Yes, sir. Well, you see, sir, as I was coming out of the 'office' I see'd a policeman hanging around the place. I tried to git away but the fellow had his eye upon me. Den he was soon up by me, and he said: 'Do you live in dat house, my man?' I said no; den he said dat he would—Hullo! what de debbil is dat?" suddenly exclaimed the negro, as the tramping of many feet was heard.

Then came a crash at the door,

Wildfern and Tom sprung to their feet.

CHAPTER XI.

A REVELATION.

WELL might Frank Hayworth shrink and cower with affright. The sight which met his gaze was one fitted to strike terror to his soul.

On the bed, sitting up and leaning upon her elbow—her eyes staring wildly around her—her shrunk, angular, death-struck face showing like a specter's in the pale light—her mouth contorted into a half-grimace—was the widow Hope! She whom the physician, an hour before, had pronounced *dead*!

Slowly Frank Hayworth recovered his scattered senses; then he drew near the bedside of the woman, whom all had thought was already wandering in spirit through the misty shadow-land.

He paused; but the woman made a gesture for him to draw nearer. He obeyed. Then she pointed feebly to a vial on the table by the bedside. The young man brought it to her, and at another sign placed it to her lips.

The old woman drank greedily, half-emptying the vial; then sunk back slowly upon the pillow. She lay perfectly still with her eyes shut.

Frank Hayworth, scarcely knowing what to do, looked wonderingly on. He seemed to be in a dream. But, all at once bestirring himself, he turned from the bed, and was about to hurry into the room where Agnes was sleeping.

The old woman, however, unclosed her eyes.

"Stop, Frank Hayworth!" she said in a faint, hollow voice. "Do not awaken Agnes; let the poor girl sleep on. Come hither, young man. My sands

are fast running away; the potent draught has given me artificial life. Come, sit near me—I will tell you a tale, and intrust you with a commission. Hurry, for time is ebbing; and with me, whose feet are even now on the boundaries of another world, time is everything. How chilly I am! The draught! Quick, Frank, the draught!"

Again the actor placed the vial to the lips of the dying woman; again she clutched it and drank eagerly of the life-sustaining liquid.

Once more the effect was apparent; for the old woman drew a long breath, and reaching out, grasped the young man with her cold, almost pulseless hand, and drew him down to a seat beside the bed.

"Had I not better call Agnes, Mrs. Hope? She sleeps just there, and—"

"No, Frank Hayworth; what I have to say must be briefly told, for life is going fast. Agnes, too, would be shocked, for she thinks I am already dead, and with her the worst is over. Let her sleep on. Now, listen, Frank, and, as I know you to be a man of honor and truth, promise me as far as you are able, to see that my dying wishes are observed."

She paused, and for a moment breathed heavily. Closing her eyes, she remained perfectly quiet for several minutes.

The young man took her gently by her thin hand—so cold, yet so damp and so grave-like! He spoke not a word, but waited for the poor woman to say what was upon her mind.

Suddenly a tremor passed over the woman's frame. She opened her eyes, and then once more reached out for the vial. Again it was placed to her lips. This time she drained it to the bottom, and casting it, empty, aside, she said, in a voice preternaturally strong:

"There! 'Tis gone! every drop! And now I must speak. Listen, Frank Hayworth, and listen well; for 'tis my last chance. Do not interrupt me by word or sign; if I fail now, the opportunity will be gone forever, and the sad secret of my bosom will die with me. I was not born, young man, in the poverty which you now see around me; far from it! I was the spoiled, pampered child of fortune; I had every thing with which to gratify the wishes of my heart. An elegant home, fond parents, wealth in abundance, gay society—I had all! And I had something else, young man! Something more fatal, unless rightly appreciated, than the poison of asps! I had beauty, wondrous, fascinating, captivating beauty. Ah, Frank Hayworth, no wonder you start and gaze at me—an old, dying woman, with hollow eyes and a thin, pinched face! But, forty years ago, I was beautiful! Oh, that the virgin splendor with which, alas, I was endowed, had been denied me!"

The old woman paused; her breath was coming and going rapidly; and, strange to say, an unnatural fire gleamed in her eyes, and a small, round, red spot glowed like a living coal upon each wan, faded cheek.

"I was rich, well-educated and handsome. It can not be wondered, then, that suitors flocked around me; they came by scores. But, one by one, I turned them off. At length, however, there came one to whom my young heart went out. He was a handsome man, almost God-like in his lofty deportment. He was well-to-do, and possessed a broad, liberal mind, cultivated to the highest degree. But, with this, he had an oily deceitful tongue! That tongue and my beauty—for he loved me for my beauty—destroyed me! 'Tis an old tale, and one soon told! I loved him too well, and not with wisdom.

"I ran away one wild night, and was secretly married to him! Married? Ah, yes! We returned; and on our way home I fancied I saw a shade of regret and alarm in my husband's manner. And then a sudden, black suspicion flashed through my mind! But I chased it away. I went to my father—explaining my absence the best way I could. I went hither, for my husband said that, for a time,

he wished our marriage kept secret! Oh! fool that I was! And yet, how I loved that man!

"Time passed on, and then another hideous trouble came upon me. You know to what I refer. Well, this could not be concealed from my mother and father. They upbraided me, and then my father, on his knees, besought me to tell him the man who had dishonored him. I held my peace, for I had promised *him* to say nothing of our marriage; and I knew a day would come when I could prove my purity and innocence. Then my father swore a fierce oath, and bade me in sternest language to tell him the name of my lover.

"Still, I answered not a word; I *could not* betray the man I loved, though death was staring me in the face! Then, with a storm in his bosom, and a fierce anathema on his lips, my father clutched me by the arm, and leading me from the parental roof, hurled me out into the bleak street!

"I wandered forth into the deserted streets, which, that night, were like it is to-night, swept by driving gusts. I roamed the unfrequented by-ways of this great city all that night; and when the dawn broke, I sat down upon the steps of a lordly mansion. I knew not where I was. As I sat there, the door suddenly opened, and who should come forth but the *man I loved*! He was arrayed for a gunning expedition. I sprang to my feet, and clung around him. In a few words I told him my tale, and begged him to claim me as his wife—to remove the stigma from my name; but, instead of sympathizing with me, he gazed at me sternly, and then, with a mocking laugh, told me that I had been 'very imprudent!' But, I still clung to him. I would not thus let him go. A dark frown came over his face; for, at that moment, an open buggy drove up. In it sat a young man. And then, before I knew it, this man—this false lover of mine—flung me rudely aside, and bounding down the steps, sprang into the vehicle and dashed off.

"Then I knew that I had been deceived—that the marriage was in all probability a sham—a villainous ruse. I slowly arose and tottered away—anywhere, I cared not—so that I was moving! Suddenly, my father's aristocratic mansion towered before me. Instinctively I paused and turned toward the old familiar home; my heart yearned for it. In a moment, despite the early hour, I was on the steps and had rung the bell with a nervous hand. The door was soon opened, and my father, stern, indignant and repelling, stood there. He gave me one glance of withering scorn, and then hurled the door to. I distinctly heard the lock turn in the bolt, and my father's heavy steps receding down the hall. *I was disowned!* Oh, God! stand by me now!"

For several moments the poor old woman paused; she seemed to be husbanding her strength, and endeavoring to freshen her memory.

But, at the pressure of Frank Hayworth's hand, she rallied:

"I cannot tell you the life I led then. I often saw him who had been my ruin; but he never recognized me—never sought me, his victim, to give me alms! But, the *trying time* of my life was fast approaching. You know what was that time. I determined to make one desperate effort in behalf of that unborn innocent, and you can understand the object of such an effort. I sought out the man I still loved; I dogged his steps whithersoever he went. I gave him no peace. At last, on the condition that I would swear never more to bother him with my presence—that I would not reveal his name as connected with my child—that I would raise no hindrance to any future marriages he might make, he consented to become my lawful husband before God and man.

"So, one dark night I met him by appointment at a stage-office on Second street, and we journeyed away together to a distant village in the interior. And there we were united in the bonds of wedlock by a minister, with a witness present. That minister, whom I well knew, and the witness, are dead long ago! But, I have the certificate safe yet.

Agnes was born! I took the name I now bear, and have never been ashamed of it. The man who blighted all my hopes of life is likewise dead; he died fifteen years ago, a widower. *He married again, not many months after he had deceived me!* But, I knew it not. Oh, God! But his wife—one of the belles of Philadelphia—did not live long. A son was left, the wicked monster he is! Nay, Frank Hayworth, start not, and do not interrupt me; I have but little else to say, and but a few moments left me in which to say it. Agnes is now nearly twenty-four, and she knows not a word of her history. *That son* is twenty-three. Now, young man, search in that trunk—the old one—yonder by the wall; look in the tray and you will find a paper. Bring it here."

The actor arose to his feet, and approaching the trunk, knelt down before it. He was earnest and serious, and he knew there was no time to be lost. In a moment he returned, bringing a folded yellow sheet of paper.

"Read it, Frank Hayworth," said the poor woman, in a low breath.

The actor opened it, and glanced over it. He started wildly and staggered to his feet.

"My God! *His father!*" and reeling back, he sunk forward over the bed.

"Ay! *his father*, Frank Hayworth. Now, listen to the request of a dying woman—of one whose spirit part will soon stand in the presence of the Great Judge. Guard that paper well, and *when the time comes* give it to Agnes, and tell her gently the tale I have told you. My father, *her grandfather*, is still living; he is a very old man, and can not, in nature, last much longer! *He has no living relative of any degree, save Agnes; she is his grandchild, his own flesh and blood.* The old man is very wealthy. His property *must* descend to Agnes; and that certificate of marriage will secure it to her. Now you will know *when* to give that paper to my child. Will you not be her friend, Frank Hayworth? Will you not protect her from that monster, who unnaturally seeks her ruin? Ay! I know you will, and—Ha! I am growing cold! I am—dying! I—I—am. Farewe—l—l—my—poor—"

A rattle sounded in the throat of the dying woman; a convulsive tremor passed over her frame; then a long, sighing expiration fled out from the collapsed lungs, and the poor woman was dead!

Frank Hayworth placed the yellow, faded sheet carefully in his bosom, and kneeling beside the bed, bent his head reverentially in the presence of the dead, and prayed silently to Him who robs the grave of its victory.

And then, a soft hand was suddenly laid upon his shoulder.

CHAPTER XII.

HAND TO HAND.

WILLIS WILDFERN glared around him like a tiger at bay, as the door of the cellar to the rear was suddenly hauled open, and a half-dozen policemen sprang in.

In an instant all was confusion. Tony suddenly emerged from behind the bar, and uttering a peculiar cry, darted up the secret stairway leading to the house above. The half-drunken wretches lying over the counter, and scattered around upon the bare floor, staggered to their feet and attempted to escape. But the brawny policemen barred their way, and advanced, batons in hand, upon them.

Suddenly one of the officers cast his eyes toward our two acquaintances.

"Ha! boys!" he exclaimed, triumphantly, "we have bagged the *old rat*, at last! Onto him, my men, Five hundred dollars is the reward for him! Now, my black beauty, we have met at last!"

As the policeman spoke, he clutched his club more firmly, and without awaiting for the others, sprang forward.

But Wild Tom did not quail; he did not turn to fly, as Willis Wildfern had done. He simply reared himself, until his gigantic stature towered so high

that his bushy head almost touched the ceiling of the cellar. Then throwing himself in an attitude of defense, he raised his ponderous fist, until the swelling muscles, under the old coat sleeve, seemed as if they would burst through.

"Stop dar, whar you is, Mr. Brass-buttons! or you'll git a cold dat's past curing! Stand back, I say, white man! I ain't what people thinks me. I never harmed you, and you sha'n't put your hands on me! Stand back, or I'll smash your head into a jelly! and I can do it!"

The words were scarcely out of the man's mouth, when at a bound, the stalwart policeman, without waiting longer, bowed his head and dashed forward.

The shock was fearful; for it was man to man—muscle to muscle—brawn to brawn!

The movement of the officer was like lightning; for in the twinkling of an eye, his heavy grip was fast upon the negro's throat, and his whole weight was, at the same time, pressing him back.

The others held off; no one interfered. But all, from mere interest and excitement, watched the contest which had been inaugurated between these two giants.

Slowly the policeman followed up his advantage—the negro giving back doggedly, inch by inch, his own heavy hand clutching the officer by the shoulder. But, as yet, he made no decided effort, simply opposing his weight to the other.

Then, all at once, the policeman thrust his hand in his overcoat pocket for the manacles, which he carried with him. The pieces of steel jingled as they struck against each other.

In the twinkling of an eye, the negro paused in his retreat, and by one powerful effort of strength, wrenched the other's grasp from his throat, and instantly gripped the officer by the neck with his left hand. Then the brawny right arm was drawn back, the weighty fist swung over the black bushy head; and then, with a whiz, that fist shot out, straight from the shoulder, through the air.

A dull, sickening thud sounded on the close, still air; and then another. Releasing his hold, the negro grasped the policeman with both hands around the waist, and by a wondrous display of strength, raised him from the floor, and flung him, as a bolt from a catapult, into the little band of his companions.

Without waiting to see the effect of this bold movement, the negro raised a wild shout of triumph, and bidding his own backers on, dashed forward to the fight. The half-drunken creatures, raised to a high pitch of excitement, and now frenzied with anger, followed.

Willis Wildfern could not keep back; he was hurried along with the surging combatants, and in a moment was in the midst of the fray.

An instant later and the contending parties came together.

The policemen were not dismayed. Hitherto they had not resorted to firearms; but now as the infuriated fiends, headed by the gigantic black, bore down upon them, a pistol-barrel gleamed in the hands of one of them.

The lights were suddenly extinguished, and a fearful scene was inaugurated. Then the sharp ring of a pistol rung in the low room—then the sickening thud of falling blows, and the clicking clash of knives in contact.

The fight was desperate, but the odds were fearful. Fighting gallantly to the last, the policemen were driven backward, and then up-stairs. Then they hastily retreated, defeated but not dismayed, through the dark alley into the street.

When they returned at dawn, with reinforcements, the old house was deserted, the furniture had disappeared, as if by magic, and on the floor of the cellar, stark in death—his face battered out of shape—a venomous knife-thrust in his throat, lay the gallant policeman.

CHAPTER XIII.

A HEART TALE.

FRANK HAYWORTH, as he felt that touch upon his shoulder, slowly raised his head and glanced behind him. Although he suspected who it was, he could not help starting violently, as his gaze fell upon the pale, haggard face of Agnes Hope.

"I heard you talking, Frank, and I could not stay away," said the girl, in a low, sweet voice. "I have come to share with you your vigils."

"You had better retire, Agnes, to the other room; you need sleep. You have undergone much, and you must take good care of yourself," and he gazed kindly at her.

"And you, Frank; you, too, need repose. Go within yourself, and sleep. I will sit up, in your place. I am not afraid of her, dead, who, when living, loved me so tenderly. Alas! that I should live to see such an hour!"

"Be comforted; be of good cheer, Agnes. You have friends yet. But, indeed, you had better go now; you will need strength for the day which is rapidly coming."

He spoke very earnestly.

The girl shook her head sadly, but decidedly, as she replied:

"No, Frank; I have already slept an hour. I can not close my eyes again to-night; and if you will not go and lie down yourself, I will sit up and watch with you."

The young man could say nothing more; he simply bowed his head in acquiescence.

And there they sat, silent and thinking.

The coarse coverlet was drawn over the shrunken form on the bed, shutting out to a certain extent the dread presence. The seconds and minutes flew by; then an hour.

Agnes sat like a statue, staring before her, her dark eyes fixed—her thin, white hands crossed upon her lap—motionless.

Frank Hayworth's head leaned to one side—then on his breast. Then his hands sunk gradually down; and wearied and at last worn out, a deep slumber crept over the young man, and he slept.

How long he slumbered he knew not; but he was suddenly awakened by a soft, hot hand, laid gently upon his brow.

That hand was smoothing back the dark, clustering hair, which had fallen over the actor's brow.

The young man started; in a moment he was awake. He glanced around him, and instantly took in his position. But his face first crimsoned, then paled as his eyes fell on Agnes Hope, who had drawn her chair close to his.

There was no mistaking the import of the luster burning in the girl's eyes; there was no mistaking the meaning—told so plainly—in the quivering lip, and the heaving bosom.

And the girl did not shrink away.

"Well, Agnes?" said the young man, almost before he knew *what* he was saying.

Agnes did not reply; but her waxen cheeks flushed faintly, and she covered her face with her hands, and wept.

"What is it, Agnes?" asked the young man, in a low, trembling voice.

The girl still did not answer; but she slowly raised her tear-bedewed face, and looked at him straight and unflinchingly.

Frank Hayworth almost shuddered at what he seemed to dread as a horrid revelation; but he did not speak.

"God forgive me, Frank," began Agnes, in a voice just above a whisper; "and you, too, Frank, forgive me if what I say to you, in this lonely chamber, tenanted by death, is wrong and unmaidenly. I have struggled against the mad impulse prompting me to speak! I have *prayed* against it: but in vain! I *must* speak, or I would die! I am all alone now in the world—no one to whom to look—no one with whom to advise, and, oh, God! Frank, I can not be separated from you—for—for—I love

you!" and she bowed her head upon her thin hands, through the slender fingers of which the tears forced their way, and dropped upon the bare floor.

Suddenly she looked up, and, in a wild, enthusiastic tone, continued:

"We are both young, Frank; you have already won your way into the world's favor, and a bright and successful career is before you. I, too, *can* be successful; I feel it! Oh, Frank, with my hand in yours, I could walk peacefully over the broad road of life; for that road would be covered with roses and beauteous wild flowers; and the bending skies would smile upon us, and a perennial reign of unalloyed bliss would be ours! Oh, darling, say that your heart beats in unison with mine—say that we *can* link hands, hearts and fortunes together! Say, darling, that down in your pure and noble heart, you love me!" and in an irrestrainable moment, the poor girl arose to her feet, and flung her arms around the strong man's neck.

We can not describe the emotions which at that time rioted in Frank Hayworth's bosom; nor shall we attempt to do so.

Slowly, gently, he unlocked the thin arms clasped around his neck—tenderly he placed the maiden in a chair; and then taking her hand in his, he said, in a voice deadened with emotion, yet distinct withal, in that quiet chamber of death:

"This can not be, Agnes! for God, 'who doeth all things well,' has pronounced against it. Listen, listen, poor Agnes! Listen to a tale I will tell you, and then judge me."

Closer he drew his chair to hers—more tightly he clasped the trembling hand in his. And then Frank Hayworth told Agnes Hope the tale.

Hours passed; and then the heart-story was finished.

Then the two—the man and the maiden—knelt humbly by the bedside, on which reigned solemn death.

They arose to their feet. One glance between them, and the man leaned down, and imprinting a kiss upon the smooth brow of the maiden, said, in a sweet voice, full of rich music:

"I greet thee, my *sister*!"

And Agnes murmured:

"And I, thee, my brother! God has so willed it!"

And then the rosy dawn glinted its purple light through the broken panes, and shone cheerily in the death-chamber.

CHAPTER XIV.

MISSING.

THE long, stormy winter night had passed, the day broke, and the glad sunlight shone over the face of the snow-covered earth. The clouds had blown themselves away, and the air, though keen and frosty, was clear and brilliant.

But the rising sun brought with it no consolation for poor Fanny, the colored maid of Sadie Sayton. The girl's eyes were red with weeping, and her face so wan and haggard after a wakeful night, wore a brooding, anxious expression.

Soon after Sadie had left her room in the hotel on the night before, the colored girl had dropped cosily into an arm-chair, and in her own rude way set herself to thinking; and then, before Fanny knew it, she had slid very naturally into a half-doze, then into a sound sleep. The girl was soon in the land of dreams. She slumbered on and was only awakened by the hoarse shouting of firemen, and the jingling of their clamorous bells, as a company dashed by toward the scene of some conflagration.

Fanny sat up in the chair, and rubbed her eyes. Then she started and glanced at the clock which was ticking so loudly on the wall. Then the girl cast her eyes toward the bed.

That bed was smooth and unrumpled.

Fanny sprang to her feet. Sadie had not returned, and the hands on the clock pointed to half-past twelve.

Up and down the room strode the girl, now and then—in fact almost momentarily—pausing and bending her ear, when she thought she had at last caught the welcome sound of steps, which she knew so well. But then, the steps passed on by the door of the chamber, and died away gradually in another direction. And then a look of disappointment crept over the sable face of the anxious servant.

And all night long, from the time she had been awakened by the fire-bells, Fanny walked up and down the room anxiously—fearingly.

The day dawned—the sun arose, and still the girl strode up and down the apartment, listening as ever intently for the coming footsteps of her mistress, which would bring contentment and rest to her wearied, troubled soul.

And Sadie had not yet come.

Suddenly the girl paused in her restless promenade; a thought had struck her.

It was now a bright, clear day, and now, too, there was no danger of being lost. She would go out and search for her mistress, and inquire after her.

Alas! The poor girl did not realize what a large city spread around her, swallowed her up as it were; she could not comprehend but that *some one* must have seen "Miss Sadie," and could give her tidings of the absent one!

The girl lost no time in putting her newly-awakened thought into the shape of a resolve, and then this resolve into speedy execution.

She was soon arrayed for outside weather. Then carefully locking the door, she left word with a maid on that floor, to tell Miss Sayton, in case she returned soon, that the key was with the clerk. Then she hurried down-stairs, thence through the long hall, out into the cold, busy street, along which cutters were dashing and sleigh-bells jingling.

The girl was at first bewildered; but, after standing still for a moment, recovered herself, and joining the throng walked up Chestnut street. At every female figure which she passed, she gave a quick, scrutinizing glance; but she did not stop.

Suddenly, however, as she reached the corner of Twelfth and Chestnut, she paused as if *stuck*.

Her gaze was bent upon the tall form of a man just ahead of her. He was hurrying across the street to the opposite—that is, the north side.

With starting eyes and mouth ajar, the girl riveted her stare upon the gentleman. But it was evident *he* had not seen her; for without looking around, he reached the other side of Chestnut street, turned directly up, and hastening on, entered the Chestnut Street Theater.

It was the hour for rehearsal.

Fanny gazed at the door in which she had seen the gentleman enter, at least ten minutes after he had disappeared from view. Then shaking her head sagely, she turned away and said:

"If dat man warn't Marse Allan Hill, den I'm blind! dat's all! He was in a mons'ous big hurry anyway, to git in dat big house over dar. Wonder if Miss Sadie knows he's here by dis time? Wonder, too, if Marse Allan knows anything 'bout Miss Sadie?"

Well, he's done gone now, and I must look 'round for dat poor gal! Well, well! who'd ever a-thought dat dis—"

The rest of Fanny's soliloquy was lost as she turned at once into the great throng surging along. And then the untutored creature began to ask almost every one she met if they had seen anything of "Miss Sadie."

Thus engaged we will leave the girl, and go to others who claim our attention.

Agnes Hope had been left all alone by Frank Hayworth that morning; but, before leaving, the young man had procured a good breakfast for the orphan girl and himself.

Agnes was not afraid to remain alone in the old house.

Then in due time the solemn-visaged undertaker sent by the actor, had come, and with his assistants,

silently made his arrangements. Then he had gone and returned again with a wagon containing the neat but plain coffin.

And still Agnes was without friend or consoler in the house of death. The actor was compelled to be absent; he had a great deal to attend to. And, after he had seen the undertaker, and left full directions with him, he had hurried on to the theater to be ready at rehearsal; also to inform the management that poor Agnes could not, that night, play the role of *Emily St. Evermond*, and to give the reason therefor.

This was his errand, when Fanny saw him and watched him so eagerly at Twelfth and Chestnut, and—strange to say, called him by another name—one with which, to a certain extent, the reader has become acquainted.

As soon as the actor was free from his duties at the theater, he had hurried away back to the humble abode on Catharine street.

The day wore itself slowly away; four o'clock came and the solemn hearse drew up in front of the lonely dwelling on that humble thoroughfare of "down-town." Behind came a single carriage. In that vehicle was a minister.

Then the good doctor's carriage drew up. In a few moments all were within the house.

Then a last view was taken of the pinched face of the dead woman lying so calm, so still in the coffin; then the lid was screwed down—then the coffin solemnly borne forth and placed in the hearse waiting for it.

Agnes, leaning on Frank Hayworth's arm, walked firmly down, and entered the carriage. The minister and then the young actor, followed; and in a moment the little procession was in slow progress.

The cemetery—Laurel Hill—was reached, a few words were spoken, in a solemn, hushed tone, by the minister, and then the remains were lowered to their last resting-place.

And then the carriage was turned toward home. And what a home now for Agnes Hope!

As they were leaving the gate, two men passed by; one was a gigantic black, the other a white man. Frank Hayworth started slightly as he saw them.

But then the carriage rattled away.

* * * Late that evening, Willis Wildfern strolled into the office of a morning paper. In a moment or so he came forth, and sauntered down-town. He finally reached Locust. Up this street he turned.

That night Frank Hayworth was quite tame as *Hawkshaw*; and the part of the giddy Emily S. Evermond was not played by Agnes Hope, the orphan.

CHAPTER XV.

LOOKING FOR TRAILS.

THAT same night when to everybody's surprise Frank Hayworth played the part of *Hawkshaw* so tamely—in fact, so tamely that, failing to make use of certain points, he was *hissed* by the audience—just as soon as the play was over, the actor hurried out from the theater, and took his way rapidly down Twelfth street.

He paused for nothing. He was thinking of Agnes Hope, all alone in that dreary, desolate house on Catharine street—he was thinking of the wintriness, the despairing gloom of her soul! He was thinking of the heart-trials that poor girl had undergone—he was thinking of that trying scene between him and her, when the almost broken-hearted orphan maid had learned beyond a peradventure that between herself and Frank Hayworth a mighty mountain reared itself—that a wide gulf, deep and black, was stretching before her, far away to an unbroken shore.

All this, and more, was filling the young man's bosom—he strode on through the cold, cutting wind. But he paused not once.

Under such circumstances it was not a matter of wonder that he had failed to render his part in the play so entirely without pith and point, as, despite his popularity, to call down hisses, and to elicit from

the stage-manager the curt advice, to be more careful at the next performance.

It was now nearly midnight, and the scanty moon, which in the earlier part of the evening had flung its wan light over the great city covered by its sheeny drapery, had sunk behind the steel-blue horizon.

Frank Hayworth was now web down in the lower part of the city. The lamps were becoming more sparse, the way more desolate and drear.

He hurried on. He was near his point of destination, and a thrill of pleasure shot through his system as he knew that in a few moments, he could, by his presence, cheer away the clouds overhanging Agnes Hope, and bring a ray of sunshine to the orphan's face.

Suddenly, however, he halted. He had reached an open lot, or rather a lot made open by the burning, long since, of a house. The broken, jagged, blackened walls of that destroyed house, standing here and there in the gray gloom, looked weird and grotesque enough.

But Frank Hayworth had not paused to scan the ruins by the gray gleam of a moonless winter night.

He had seen two figures flitting on ahead of him several times. These figures had all at once disappeared in the gloom and amid the ruins of the old house.

This movement looked suspicious. Frank Hayworth paused, and felt anxiously in his pockets.

* * * We will return for a while—some hours at least—and follow the fortunes of Fanny.

It may be remembered that we left the poor girl wandering up and down Chestnut street. At first the negress was bewildered, as she was swept along almost against her will, by the flux and reflux of the thronging crowds.

But this spirit died away; for Fanny was sick at heart, and she had gone out upon another errand than to look around her or to be mystified. She was seeking her beloved mistress. So she set to work at once making inquiries.

At first people were inclined to laugh at the poor, simple-hearted creature, but when they marked how earnest were her words, and when they saw tears standing in the girl's eyes, they spoke kindly to her.

All day long Fanny wandered about. Several times she had been completely lost, but was soon set right again. She did not return to the hotel to dinner, but kept up her search, and continued to ask all she met if they had seen or heard anything of "Miss Sadie."

And then the day was drawing to a close, and the shadows in the street were lengthened and distorted.

And Fanny's search had been fruitless.

Slowly the poor girl turned herself about, and with tears in her eyes, and sadness in her heart, commenced to retrace her steps toward the hotel.

As she passed a policeman, who stood on the corner of a street, she paused. A new idea had struck her. She would speak to him and get his advice.

She told the officer all her trouble, and then asked his assistance. The policeman looked very grave and serious when he heard the strange tale told him. At first he did not answer, but scrutinized the girl's face searchingly. It was evident he did not at first believe her statement; or perhaps he thought that she was crazed; and he bade her tell the story again, watching her keenly all the time, to detect some flaw, some inconsistency. But Fanny did not blunder; she told the same tale again, and, as before, her tears flowed profusely. She begged the policeman piteously to help her friend, her "Miss Sadie."

The officer questioned her closely and rapidly for a few moments—learned how long she had been in the city—gained an inkling of the object of her visit, found out about Sadie going to the theater, and her failure to return to the hotel. Then he paused in his questioning, and pondered for several moments. Looking up, however, he bade the girl return to the

hotel, and not to go out, and that he would see that proper search was made for her mistress.

Fanny hurried home at once, but as yet she had not acquainted those at the hotel with the absence of Sadie.

Late that evening when the officer was relieved at his post, he hastened down Chestnut street, and called at the theater. The lamps were just lit in front of the play-house.

The officer waited impatiently a few moments. Then the doors were opened. Upon inquiring he learned nothing more than what the reader already knows.

Before eight o'clock that night a special detail of detectives were quietly scattering about in the great city, in search of Sadie Sayton.

When the policeman had stood that evening in the Chestnut street theater, and spoke with the night-watchman, he had not noticed that a tall man for an instant paused in the shade of one of the large lamps, and glared at the two.

Nor had he heard the low, satisfied chuckle of the tall man, as he rubbed his hands together and walked away.

That man was Willis Wildfern; he had just parted, in a low quarter of Juniper street, from a gigantic black. And as he walked on, he muttered to himself.

In a few moments he had handed an advertisement, in a disguised hand-writing, to one of the clerks in the office of a morning paper

CHAPTER XVI.

"A FAIR EXCHANGE IS NO ROBBERY."

FRANK HAYWORTH uttered an exclamation of vexation, as he finished his vain search through his pockets. He had no weapon about him, not even a pen-knife; nor did he have a cane. He was entirely defenseless.

He peered sharply ahead at the gloomy spot where he had seen the two men disappear in the black shadow of the ruined house. Then he glanced behind him. No one was in sight in either direction, back or front. The darkness to the rear was ominous; that in front, more so still. But, behind him the lights ended in a more brilliant perspective than in front; for in the latter case the scattered gas-lamps stretched away into absolute darkness. In fact they did not extend many squares below Catharine street.

The young man was not far from this thoroughfare; one block more and he would have been there.

Buttoning his overcoat around him, the young man keeping his eyes well about him, strode forward along the lonely way.

He reached the gloomy shade of the old burnt walls, hanging threateningly over the street, and as yet he had seen no more of the two figures, who had disappeared just there.

Do what he could, Frank Hayworth trembled slightly, as, at last, he stood full in the black shadow; and then he quickened his pace. He was almost clear of the place—his feet were upon the next sidewalk—when in the twinkling of an eye, two forms dashed out silently from behind a low, scathed wall, and advanced upon him.

Before the actor could speak, their intention was evident.

The young man paused and retreated rapidly; but one of those attacking rushed boldly on him.

Then suddenly Frank Hayworth again paused, and as the waylayer dashed forward, he met him with a heavy blow in the face. Nothing human could stand up under that vengeful stroke, and the man went down like an ox.

But before the actor could follow up his advantage, the other, a perfect giant in stature, rushed upon him and dealt him a stunning blow with his clinched fist.

The stroke fell with a fearful thud. Without a groan or a cry, the actor sunk on the snow-covered walkway.

In an instant the Herculean fellow was above him—his red eyes burning down upon the dead-white face of the prostrate man—his hands in his pockets. In a moment; he had rudely torn open the overcoat, and was about searching the vest-pockets, when suddenly a faint sparkle as from a stone glittered in his eyes. With a low chuckle, the man stooped, unfastened the small diamond-pin, and was about transferring it to his own pockets, when a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

"Give me the jewel, my good fellow; I want it as evidence. Besides, I will balance it in gold, and you can keep what else you may find."

Thus spoke a voice in a low tone at the other's elbow.

The words came from him who had fallen before Frank Hayworth's first and only blow.

The gigantic fellow hesitated for a moment.

"All right, of course. Anything to 'commode' you," and he handed the stone to the other.

This man quickly placed it in his vest-pocket, and then said:

"Come, we must be off—Pshaw! never mind him; he'll come to. So don't look scared. Now, hurry to the rendezvous; *to-night we must move*. I'll meet you at half-past one."

"All right; I am off," said the man, turning at once; and he hurried back up Twelfth street.

Then he who had received the diamond stood still for a moment and gazed about him.

"All right!" he muttered. "'Two birds with one stone!' Ay! And, yes, the coast is clear. Now, my pretty one, we will see if certain memories—old time pledges, hold good with you! We'll see, too, if a *mark* can be made! Something! anything to make up for the other failure!"

So saying, he hurried away toward Catharine street.

And Frank Hayworth lay quiet—apparently lifeless, in the chilling snow.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE HANDS OF THE PHILISTINES.

* * * AGNES HOPE walked uneasily up and down the limits of the room, in which we have seen her. A deep shade of anxious thought was upon her face, and her eyes glanced furtively, flaringly, around her. Anon she would pause, and bend her ear, as some chance sound echoed in the quiet room.

Agnes felt her loneliness keenly; she missed the kindly company of her invalid mother; she missed the dim eye flashing forth its faint, but earnest welcome; she missed the tremulous words of greeting, the warm embrace of a mother's love.

Silently she gazed at the bed; and as she looked, the expression of fear and shrinking passed slowly away. A soft, subdued quiet stole over her pale features—tears bedimmed her large, black eyes, and with a gurgling sob, which she strove to repress, the orphan girl sunk down upon her knees—her face buried in the faded, time-worn coverlet.

Long she knelt there without sign or motion, in the awe-inspiring silence of the lonely chamber.

Agnes Hope was praying!

Suddenly a neighboring clock sounded on the quiet air. Its echoes flooded the lonely room, and startled the ears of the orphan maiden.

The girl started and raised her face—that face wet with tears; then she slowly arose to her feet.

Though her eyes were red, and her face wet with her falling tears, and marked with lines of agony and suffering which had torn her bosom; yet the expression resting on the sad countenance now, was sweet and resigned, like unto that of a spotless vestal.

The girl's prayer had been answered; she had sought and found,

"Surcease of Sorrow."

The echoing clock-bell vibrated in the room, and

its solemn quaver recalled the girl to her lonely, cheerless situation.

"Eleven o'clock!" she muttered. "Thank God for it! For—for—Frank will soon be here, and I believe I *would* die if I had to stay here all alone! The play will soon be over, and Frank promised to come as soon as the curtain was down. What would people say—the great, idle, gossiping world—God be thanked that *our* world is not large—if it were known that Frank Hayworth and myself stayed alone in this old house to-night!"

The pure, guileless maiden started as she asked herself the question, and for an instant a spreading blush crimsoned her cheeks. But this passed off almost at once, as she murmured:

Up and down she strode.

Some time passed. Still Agnes Hope, with thoughtful step, walked the uncarpeted floor of her poverty-stricken home.

A half-hour went by—then three quarters; and the dreary midnight was fast approaching.

At length Agnes paused.

"Frank is—is—late to-night," she muttered. "Can he have forgotten his promise? Has he simply promised, indeed, that he may thus get away from me—say good-by to me? Has—has—oh, God! has Frank forsaken me? No! no! I wrong him. Something has delayed him. Can any harm have befallen him? My God! I shudder! The way is lonely—the night dark and cold, and few are abroad. Good heavens! Suppose that—"

At that moment there was a cautious rattle at the door down-stairs. Then the rattle was more decided; and then the door gave way. In a moment heavy, hurried footsteps echoed in the narrow hall beneath—then upon the creaking stair-case.

"Thank God!" and a blush came to her face as she spoke; "he has come at last! Ha! I forgot I had locked my door. I am coming, Frank!" and she bounded forward and opened the door.

A man strode in; and Agnes Hope, glancing quickly at him, uttered a wild, heart-rending cry and reeled back in the room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

UNDER LOCK AND KEY.

We dare say that by this time the reader is anxious to learn something of poor Sadie Sayton. Save indirectly, we have not referred to her for some time.

When last the reader saw her she was being borne helpless and unresisting up-stairs by Wildfern and the Lady Maud. Since then we have told nothing of her.

We will now return to the poor girl, the victim of such a peculiar concatenation of devilish—that is a good word—circumstances.

Those who bore her unconscious form between them paused not until they reached the landing at the top of the second flight of stairs. Here they stopped a moment for breath. But in a moment more they hurried on again, this time turning sharply to the left and going down a dim-lit passage-way.

Then they halted before a door. The woman, inserting her hand in her bosom, drew out a key and quickly unlocked the door.

The two at once entered a magnificently furnished room and placed the senseless form of the poor girl upon a bed. They then lowered the gas, which was burning in the soft-tinted, rose-colored globes. They then unbound the slender wrists and loosening the handkerchief which was over her head, silently withdrew from the room, and locked the door behind them.

An hour passed—then another.

And all this time the unfortunate girl had remained motionless, and, it seemed, scarcely breathing. But at last a quick, flitting shiver passed over her frame; by a sudden movement she sat up on her elbow, and then, with a low cry, she tore the handkerchief from her head and gazed around her.

At first she could not realize her position; she only remembered seeing a strange girl lying in a tall man's arms, and her subsequent swooning in the snow.

She sprung from the bed, as suddenly her soul was filled with horror, and rushed to the door. It was locked! Then she glanced around her like a tigress.

There were no windows to the room—no outlet save the door now locked.

A horrible suspicion flashed over the poor girl; her eyes seemed to start from her head. She glanced at her hand. The much-prized ring was absent still! Then the whole evening, with its list of startling events, rushed over her like an avalanche.

Again she tried the door, but it yielded not. Then she raised her voice in a long, wild shriek. But no answer came back to her. She heard cautious steps outside; but they passed *by* the door and then paused.

And then, with despair in her heart, and gloom in her soul, the girl—a *prisoner*!—tottered back and fell fainting upon the bed.

From a swoon Sadie Sayton passed gradually and, to herself, imperceptibly into a deep, almost dreamless slumber. We say 'almost,' for it was not until nearly day that a vision passed over her brain.

A fearful vision it was.

Sadie dreamed that she was floating in air over a wild, dark sea. No light in the atmosphere above, no light on the sea below. A terrible silence hung over every thing, and as she hovered in the air, endeavoring to keep herself bouyed up, she could hear nothing but the labored breath coming from her own bosom, and the ceaseless flapping of her wings.

But, despite her efforts, she gradually sunk lower and lower! And then she could dimly see the waters of the glancing, dingy pool, and could hear a weary, dismal sighing and groaning coming up from the dark lake like the wailings of lost souls.

Desperately she fanned the quiet, sultry air with her wings, endeavoring to soar higher and to speed away from the awe-inspiring place. But her efforts were vain. She sunk lower and lower; and then a terrible mephitic odor arose from the lake, and filled her nostrils with an undefinable stench.

A deadening, swooning sensation took possession of her; her wings commenced to grow weary, and her laboring breath came and went with a fearful rapidity.

And now her wings touched the surface of the dark tarn. Then a mighty shudder thrilled her frame as from the shock of a heavily-charged battery; and again with her wings she beat the dead, like air, in a mad endeavor to rise above the pool. But her wings sunk lower in the shiny waters; and now her feet were in the cold flood!

Just then two dark-winged figures, terrible to look upon—too terrible to describe—darted upon her. As they passed along, just skimming over the pool, they each gave her a downward push and then glanced on.

Like lead she sunk in the chilling waters—her limbs benumbed and helpless, her wings collapsed and drooping.

Down! Down!

The black waters groaned in her ears, and unseen spirits of evil beneath the black waters of the lake were clutching her now in their slimy grasp, and dragging her down slowly—slowly.

Oh, fearful moment! Oh, worse than death!

But just then the leaden gloom above was illumined, as with the brightness of a shining moon, and a white-winged angel appeared, hovering just above her.

Sadie looked, and, with a transport of joy pervading her frame, she beheld in the angel the noble face and form of one so dear to her heart! Sorrowfully he gazed at her for a moment and then folding the long, sweeping wings about him, preparatory to a swoop, he smiled lovingly upon her.

Then, in the twinkling of an eye, the two black-

winged forms, which before had flitted by, arose from the surface of the lake and dashed upon the white angel. They met with a resounding shock.

The air was filled with the loud, angry beating of wings, and a terrible conflict was inaugurated.

Still Sadie was sinking; and the cold, black waters broke against her neck, and washed over her head.

And then, like the shifting of a panorama, the air grew brilliant and dazzling as if lit by the splendor of the mid-day sun; and then—

But, with a sudden start, Sadie awoke.

She had felt a cool hand pressing her hot brow, and had heard low words sounding faintly on her ear. She opened her eyes and looked around her.

A faint light was burning in the room, and the girl had just time to catch sight of a female figure disappearing through the door. Then the door was closed with a sudden snap, and the key grated in the lock.

Sadie was again a prisoner.

The poor girl raised herself and glanced around her. She felt invigorated and refreshed, despite the terrible dream which had just agonized her bosom. For a moment she could not tell where she was. She rubbed her temples and gazed around her.

On the hearth was a round patch of brilliant light, shimmering down through the chimney. And the streets without were noisy with the rumble of jolting cars.

Sadie thus knew that the dark night had passed, and that day had come again to gladden the earth. She slowly arose from the bed and tottered to a chair.

We shall not pause to give the varying emotions which flashed in quick succession through the bosom of the girl. She had a deep and well-grounded suspicion as to the motive prompting her close confinement, especially in such a richly-furnished room. Sadie knew the wickedness of the great city in which she was temporarily stopping; perhaps her notions of the dark crimes in Philadelphia were exaggerated.

So there was but little doubt in the girl's mind as to the occasion of her imprisonment; yet she was mystified and confused. And then, at last, she burst into a flood of tears.

Nor did these tears, as is generally the case, give relief. Her fears were of great magnitude, and she had too much at stake for a flood of tears to wash fears and doubts all away.

An hour went by; and then the door was softly opened, and a large tray, containing a substantial breakfast, was shoved into the room.

Sadie sprung to her feet and glanced around. She saw nothing, however, but a hand, which suddenly disappeared.

In a moment the girl was by the door, her hand wrenching at the bolt. But the door was already locked!

With a stifled cry, the maiden reeled back to a chair.

The hours passed by, and the day wore itself away; and the poor girl saw nothing of the bright, glorious weather without, save the small, shifting spot of daylight glimmering down the chimney flue; and she heard nothing, save the jolting cars and the deadened rattle of the lumbering drays, wagons and carriages.

About mid-day, as near as the maiden could judge, the door was again opened, and another tray containing food was half-way protruded; but as he or she who held it saw the contents of the other still untouched, the tray was withdrawn and the door again closed and locked.

This time Sadie paid no heed to the opening and shutting of the door; for she was thinking of her fearful dream—of Allan Hill—of him, too, who had played Hawkshaw—of the tall, bearded, impertinent stranger at the theater—of the sight she had seen through the curtainless window of the old house, and a black cloud of despair was settling over her soul.

Then the glimmer of daylight in the hearth faded slowly; then it was entirely gone.

Sadie gazed fondly at the spot it had occupied, and as it vanished she heaved a deep sigh. She missed that small patch of sunlight—rather daylight—as she would a friend; for it *had* been her friend—the only link between her and the outside world.

The day was drawing to a close, and the long winter night, with its cold winds and dark shadows was at hand.

Sadie shuddered as she thought what that night might bring forth!

And then at last she arose from her chair, and began to walk the room with a nervous, faltering step;

"I—I—feel faint and feverish!" she muttered; "and—and—I *must* eat. Yet I distrust it. But I cannot bear this fearful tax upon me without food. God help me!"

As she spoke she arose and approached the tray, which had rested undisturbed since it was placed within the door that morning. She stooped down and, taking it up, carried it to a table. She partook sparingly of the food, and then she drew back and again began her restless promenade up and down the room.

Again the black thoughts came to her mind—again the hideous dream flashed over her. She could not dislodge that dream. There it was, in her brain, clear, distinct, awful! It rose up constantly before her like a grim phantom—an irrepressible shade.

The rumbling in the streets had, to a great extent, died away, and nothing but an occasional jingle of the car bells echoed faintly in the quiet air of the room.

Fainting, sickened at heart, her pulse throbbing with fever, Sadie Sayton tottered forward and sunk unconscious upon the bed.

At that moment a hand was placed upon the bolt of Sadie's room; but no one would have known him in his auburn hair and whiskers, as the dark bearded Willis Wildfern.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GLITTER OF STEEL.

THE door yielded to Wildfern's hand, and in an instant he stood within Sadie's room. For a moment he started and gasped for breath. The air of that room was absolutely poisonous to one like him, who lived so much in the out-door atmosphere.

One greedy, vengeful glance toward the bed on which lay the unconscious maiden, and he muttered to himself:

"The ventilation is poisonous! It will kill her! Lady Maud should have fixed the damper."

Then he strode hurriedly to the chimney-place. Again he looked toward the bed, but she who lay there still moved not.

In a moment he stooped down, and reaching his hand well up into the flue, suddenly turned the flanges of a damper concealed there. Almost instantly a change was effected in the atmosphere of the room.

Wildfern's heart beat tumultuously as he stood over the form of Sadie Sayton. Wild commotions were holding a place in his bosom; diabolical dreams were floating through his brain.

"Good heavens!" he muttered; "a very queen! and mine at last!"

In an impulsive moment he leaned over her; the hot breath from his mouth smote her face. Then he laid his hand convulsively upon her round, soft arm.

At that instant a wild shiver crept like lightning through Sadie Sayton's frame; the fleeting color came again to her lips and cheeks, and then her eyes opened.

One glance, and with a piercing shriek, the girl tore herself away from the villain's clutch, and sprung from her bed on the further side. Then, in a moment more, she had fled to the corner of the room, where she hastily cowered down.

Wildfern, though startled at first, quickly recovered himself, and stood composedly gazing at the shrieking maiden.

"Be not alarmed, miss," he said, in a mild, bland voice, in tones, too, entirely different from those he was in the habit of using. "I am sent by the good lady to look after you. She said you were ill—picked up in the snow and so on. I am a physician. Come, come, my dear young lady, and be seated. I will not harm you."

And as he spoke he advanced toward her, as if to lead her to a chair.

In an instant Sadie was upon her feet, her eyes flashing fire, her whole frame dilating with indignation, yet trembling with fear.

"Stand back, sir," she said, in as stern a voice as she could command; "approach me not! You are *no* physician! You are the villain who has entrapped me, and brought me here to work out my ruin! I know the place—oh, God, I know you—I know all!"

Wildfern paused as if shot; a dark, foreboding frown crept to his face, and he gripped his hands viciously together.

"Ha!" he exclaimed in his natural voice, which Sadie at once recognized as that of the man who had watched her so keenly at the theater, at times which, years ago, had sounded in her ears. "Then you are well informed. And, my pretty bird, did the woman give you all this news?" and he gazed her directly in the face.

"I learned what I have said, for myself; and I am now convinced from your conduct, sir, that I was not wrong. Shame on you, sir!" and her eyes flashed forth the scorn which was swelling in her bosom.

But Willis Wildfern only laughed as he carelessly flung himself into a chair.

"Well, well," he said, in a low, insinuating voice, never removing his eyes from the glowing face before him, "granting that you are right in your conjectures, what then? Does *that* release you from this *hospitable* mansion? Ha! ha! my pretty one, you are now where few eyes seldom look. Yet, for all that, you need not be alarmed; in me, my fair miss, you have nothing to fear. Trust me, and all will be well."

"Trust you? Never! Oh, sir! I *beg* you let me go hence; I pray to you! Ay, I will kneel to you! I have an aged father, sir, who dotes on me—whose life is wrapped up in mine. A breath of suspicion against me and he would go down to the grave with his gray hairs dishonored—go down cursing me—cursing the day when I was born to him! Oh, sir, I beg you, for your *mother's* sake, to let me go hence! I'll never breathe a word to living soul of my imprisonment here! I will—"

"Enough! enough! girl!" and his eyes glinted their dark fires as he spoke. "Think you, I could fling away this chance to *win* you? No, no! Do not kneel to me! Consent to be my lawful wife, and a life of happiness awaits you. Refuse, and, by high heavens, you shall die and rot here all alone? I never yield a point, or swerve from a course once marked out!" And he emphasized his last words with an oath.

Sadie Sayton uttered an agonizing cry, and sunk helpless in a chair.

The man said nothing, but looked at the girl as a fowler watches the game he has snared; and in his eyes the while, determined fires were burning brighter, moment by moment.

At length the girl looked up. Her face was as white as a winding sheet, her lips purple and compressed, the broad, smooth brow wrinkled into a frown of soul-suffering, the large blue eyes lack-luster and dim. She endeavored to speak, but, at first, her lips refused to move.

Wildfern gazed at her half-anxiously; but there was no pity in his look; all was power—remorselessness.

But Sadie Sayton at length said, in a voice just above a whisper—spoke the words as if she were temporizing:

"I can love but one man; I am plighted to that man already!" and she buried her face in her hands, as the dark, damning revelation of the night before rushed over her again with ten-fold strength.

"Ha! ha! plighted to another! Ay! and he *is* a strolling vagrant! a fourth-rate actor—a man who can neither appreciate you nor your beauty—a man who has deceived you, by toying with you and then giving his real love to one of his kind—a low-born, obscure actress, with no name and nothing else, save a faded childish face and oily tongue! Bah! I can read secrets, and I have already learned yours."

Sadie Sayton shook like a leaf, and then a vicious, crimsoning passion passed over her cheeks; she raised her head and glared like a tigress in the face of the man before her.

"Give me the *PROOF* of this!" she gasped. "Give me the proof, or I'll brand you as a coward and a falsifier!"

Her eyes fairly blazed with angry lightning as she uttered the words above, nor did she remove her scintillating orbs from Wildfern's face.

The man sat upright at her vehemence, and the look of brutish admiration on his face grew intenser. But then he smiled again, scornfully, as he said:

"Methinks, my pretty one, you do not need much proof after what you beheld last night through the window of the old house! Ha! ha! You see, my girl, I know everything!"

Sadie again shrunk away.

She shuddered, and her bosom heaved wildly; but she controlled herself as she said, in a low, decided tone:

"And yet, I must have *other* proof. Like me, he may have been the victim of design. No, no, man! I'll not distrust him: I *know* he is true to me still!"

Wildfern paused, and bent his head before he replied. When he looked up he asked, in an eager tone:

"And so you would have further proof, eh? Let me know if he wore ornaments of value of any kind?" and he gazed her somewhat anxiously in the face.

Sadie did not answer at once. She had noted the quick, eager look—the anxious glitter in the man's eyes. But she was powerfully wrought upon; she was thinking of the diamond pin which *she* had given her lover, and the thought now rushed over her mind that this man knew something of that lover's gift.

But, with her heart in her mouth, she faltered:

"Yes, yes; he wore a diamond scarf-pin; it was made in the shape of a hand," and she watched his face.

For an instant Wildfern quailed under that look, and he bent his head to conceal his emotion. When he looked up and replied, his words were very serious.

"Then *that* pin shall be a proof for you," he said, decidedly. "He has given it to the girl he loves, and never wears it, himself, save on the stage. I will get that pin from the girl, for *she does not love the man*; she *plays* with him, to wheedle him out of his earnings. In less than twenty-four hours I will show you the jewel. If that will not be sufficient, I will, under certain conditions on your part, show you other sights. Till then I'll leave you. Ha! by Jove! 'tis later than I thought," he exclaimed, as he drew out his watch and glanced at it. "I must be off; but before I go, my sweet one, I claim just one kiss for keeping you company so long!"

As he spoke he sprung to his feet, and darted upon the girl. In the twinkling of an eye Sadie eluded him, and rushed behind the bed. The man was not to be deterred; he advanced upon her. The poor girl plead, but vainly.

Then a fixed determination grew upon her face.

"Stand back, sir! I am prepared, and will defend myself to the last!" and in a moment a bright blade flashed in her hand.

Wildfern retreated, awed and astounded. Then, with the eyes of a basilisk, he glared at her. Summoning his courage, he made ready to dash upon her again.

But then there came a decided rap on the door.

CHAPTER XX.
THWARTED.

WILLIS WILDFERN paused and stepped back hastily to the door. He opened it and looked out.

Lady Maud was standing there.

"You are wanted, captain," she said, in a low voice; "Wild Tom is at the door. As last night, he says his business is urgent."

Wildfern did not reply. He frowned slightly, and then turning his head, he gave Sadie a significant look, and, without any words, went out. He locked the door securely, and gave the key to Lady Maud.

The two hurried down-stairs—neither speaking. But when Wildfern had nearly reached the door at the street, he suddenly paused.

"By Jove! I forgot!" he exclaimed, as he took off the whig and false beard, and flung them aside.

With that the man opened the front door and went out. At the bottom of the steps he joined another man, and together they hurried away. They took their way up Locust street, and soon disappeared in the gloom.

That night, just before the performance at the Chestnut Street Theater was over, two men emerged from a court in Juniper street, between Chestnut and Market, and took their way stealthily along. On reaching Chestnut street they hurried down until they were opposite the theater. Here, in the gloom of the overhanging houses, they paused and kept their eyes bent upon the theater, and on the corner at the drug-store.

Then, at last, the play was ended, and the crowd began to pour out into the streets; and then Frank Hayworth appeared in the crowd at the corner, and hurried down Twelfth street.

The men had seen him, and after noting the direction he had taken, they walked rapidly away down the same street, taking care to keep well ahead of the actor.

When Willis Wildfern had gone, Lady Maud leaned breathlessly against the door.

"Poor, poor thing—*forced* to marry a villain! and I cannot help her! But, I'll see! I'll see!"

She turned at once and went up-stairs. In a moment she was in Sadie's room again—a moment more she had the poor girl in her arms and murmured:

"Poor child, I pity you! I was not always as I am; and—and I will help you if I can."

Then Sadie answered, in a low, sweet whisper:

"God bless you! God bless you!" and clung to her the closer.

It was a very late hour when the Lady Maud left the room of the prisoner; and, as usual, she locked the door.

But, as the woman trod slowly down-stairs, to seek her own secluded room, she muttered:

"*I'll stand by her!* And if no other means presents for rescuing her, may God strike me dead, if I do not set—"

Here her voice sunk lower, and the rest of the words were lost as she suddenly hurried down-stairs.

We have left Agnes Hope in a rather cavalier manner, unnoticed for sometime. It will be remembered, too, that we left her under rather peculiar circumstances.

We will now return to her lonely room, where she was so suddenly startled by the entrance of a man.

One glance at him who had entered thus unceremoniously, and Agnes uttered a cry, and staggered backward in her room.

The man paused for a moment and leered like a demon at her.

"Ha! Agnes Hope, you did not expect *me*; but you did *another*! Ha! ha! I am ahead of *him*!" and he advanced boldly into the room.

"*You* here, Willis Wildfern!" exclaimed the

maiden, shrinking still further from him, and raising her hands as if to ward him off.

The man laughed.

"There is no need to answer that question, Agnes, seeing that you know me," he said. "You see I have long promised you a visit, and I thought to-night was as good a time as any. Besides that, this is my house, and I suppose I have a right to come into it, eh?"

"This room is sacred to me, Willis Wildfern, and you know it. You certainly are aware of my recent affliction; are you not *man* enough to respect me in my sorrow?"

For a moment the fellow cast his eyes down, and it really seemed that a shade of remorse flitted over his face. But he quickly looked up, and certainly there was no such shade there then.

"Why, Agnes Hope, I could not prevent your mother from dying. That was the doctor's business. Nor have I—for I must be candid—any extra amount of sorrow at the calamity. All I care for is my rent for the last two months. Have you got it?" and he smiled satanically in her pale, haggard face.

The poor girl started perceptibly, and her frame shook violently. But her emotion passed off, and she said, in a low voice.

"'Tis a strange time—an unseasonable hour—for you to come for your money."

"That is not the question, Agnes Hope; I choose my own time for doing what I please—remember that! *Have* you the money for the rent, and can you settle *now*?" and he advanced a step nearer to her.

The girl looked at him with affright, and retreated still further into the room.

"I have always, always, paid you, Mr. Wildfern," she gasped, "but I have not the money now. I do not earn much; and I had to purchase things for my poor mother, sir!" and she broke down from emotion.

"Then get your lover, Frank Hayworth, to pay it for you!" exclaimed the man, rudely. "I am sure you are not chary with *your favors to him*!"

"Monster! villain! What mean you?" exclaimed the girl, her frail form dilating with sudden indignation, her eyes flashing fire. She half-advanced upon the man.

"I have touched you tenderly, I see, my charmer," said Wildfern, with a sneer.

"But, I will answer your question thus: I mean that you love this actor too much for a sister, that is, *some* would think so. There, is *that* plain enough?"

"Oh, wicked villain! despicable wretch that you are!" exclaimed the girl, her whole being worked up to an ungovernable degree, "I fling back your words! I *scorn* them! and spit upon you! Begone, sir, and leave me, leave me alone with my sorrow! Begone, sir, and respect a friendless woman. Begone! for I loathe the sight of you!" and she indignantly waved him from the room.

But Wildfern did not move; he stood perfectly quiet, and smiled wickedly.

"No, no, Agnes Hope, I'll *not* go!" he said, in a low, determined voice. "I came on a double business; when it is accomplished expect me to go, and not before! Need I recall to you an old-time tale, Agnes Hope? Methinks there is no occasion. Need I recall to you a bargain once made between you and myself? Need I freshen your memory by telling you that long years ago—when I was poor and honest—*honest*? ha! ha!—that I loved you madly? And you, Agnes Hope, *said* that *you loved me*! How lying were your lips! But, I suspected you; and then you said, solemnly; '*If I do not wed you, Willis, you may cut the mark of a cross upon my brow, and mar my beauty forever.*' Then we made that bargain; ay! and both of us *swore to it*! Now, Agnes, you have *not* wedded me, you say you *will not* wed me! I have come for the forfeit. I have spared you thus long; but, now the hour is here, and I am prepared and ready for the work!"

As he spoke he advanced upon her at once. There was a terrible earnestness in his tone, a fearful, snake-like glitter in his eye. He continued to advance upon the poor girl, who had now retreated into the extreme corner of the room.

"Back! back, Willis Wildfern! in those days I did but jest! and you know it was but a jest," Agnes exclaimed, in a desperate, agonizing voice. "Back! or I'll cry for help. Oh, God! spare me, spare me, man!" she cried, in piteous, wailing tones, as the villain darted upon her.

"Cry for help, my pretty Agnes! Cry away and as loud as you please; but 'tis of no avail. And, remember that the hour is late, and no one passing! So cry away, but at last you are in my hands!"

As he uttered the last words he drew a keen knife and threw himself upon her at a bound. The girl struggled wildly; and then the old house rung with shriek after shriek. But Agnes was a baby in that strong man's arms. Then his broad palm covered her mouth.

At that instant there was a furious clatter and banging at the street door down-stairs.

Wildfern paused, and a dark frown came over his face. He bent his head and listened. The knocks were momentarily increasing, and the door was shaken violently.

The man, still holding his hand over the girl's mouth, glanced quickly around him. Then, in the twinkling of an eye, he hurled the maiden rudely to the floor, and the long knife was pointed to her throat, as the man whispered, fiercely:

"I am going now! But, dare breathe my name, and you are a dead woman! Swear to me, Agnes Hope, that you will not reveal me to living soul, as having been here to-night! Swear! or, by heavens, I'll drive the knife into your throat!" and he pushed the keen knife venomously forward.

There was no time for the girl to think—the man was in terrible earnest, and *death* stared her in the face.

"I—I swear," she said in a low voice.

The man at once released her, and darted to the front window. In an instant he had flung up the sash, sprung out, and, holding by the sill, found with his feet the shutter below, and swung himself to the pavement.

He was not a moment too soon; for at that moment the front door gave way with a crash, flying feet echoed in the hall and up the stair-case, and in a few seconds Frank Hayworth burst like a tornado, into the room.

CHAPTER XXI. READING ADVERTISEMENTS.

THE reader will remember that Frank Hayworth was left all alone, lying senseless and motionless upon the snow-covered pavement of the street. Those who had so murderously assailed him, as we know, hurried off, at once, as if their work was done, and done to suit them.

For fifteen minutes the actor lay perfectly quiet; but then suddenly there was a sign of returning consciousness. A shiver passed through his frame, then another, and in a moment he sat up in the snow, and gazed around him. In an instant every thing flashed over him; and there around him were the marks of the recent struggle. Then a terrible thought went like a racing wind through his brain, and by a quick effort he sprung to his feet.

Frank Hayworth did not pause, but glancing around him in every direction he buttoned his coat about him, and strode on down Twelfth street. Just before he reached Catharine street he fancied he saw before him a sitting figure. He paused to examine it. This occasioned a delay of some minutes.

But then, all at once, whatever it was, the figure disappeared. And then the actor stood in Catharine street. He started suddenly as if pierced with a knife; for just then a long, wailing shriek, and then

an agonizing cry for help, rung out from the old house just above, which he knew so well, and echoed with startling effect upon the sleeping air.

Frank Hayworth knew that shriek—that cry. He waited not a moment but dashed on. When he reached the house he found the door not only locked, but evidently barred.

And still the cries came forth from that upper room.

Putting his shoulder against the panel, and exerting his whole strength, the actor was gratified in seeing the door give way with a crash; and in a moment the young man had bounded up-stairs, and then stood in the room of Agnes Hope, the actress.

He glanced around him like a tiger; but he saw no object upon which to wreak his vengeance. He glanced at the window through which the night-wind was sweeping raw and chill; then he shrugged his shoulders.

Hurrying to the window, he closed the sash, and returned at once to Agnes.

The poor girl was lying on the floor, her face to the bare boards, her long black hair in wild disarray falling over her head in disordered profusion. She did not move a limb.

In an instant the actor knelt by her side, and raised the girl in his strong arms. She still made no sign, and gave no motion.

Frank Hayworth turned the sweet white face so that the light fell upon it. Oh, how haggard—how anguished—how stricken that face!

The actor started.

"Arouse, Agnes, my sister!" he whispered in her ear, in a tone full of yearning sympathy; "*I am here.*"

As the warm, earnest words fell upon her slumbering ear, Agnes started. The blood flowed to her cheeks and she opened her eyes. As her gaze flashed upon Frank Hayworth, she uttered a low cry of joy, and staggering to her feet clutched her arms around his neck, and buried her head in his broad bosom.

"Oh, Frank!" murmured the girl, "I am so glad you have come! Oh! what a hideous phantom!" she paused all at once.

"Phantom, Agnes? I am sure I heard flying feet, and—and—a man's voice. Tell me that man's name, Agnes, that I may chastise him," and the young fellow leaned down to catch the answer.

But the girl still hesitated.

"Speak, Agnes! tell me the name of him who dared invade the privacy of your chamber!"

The girl shivered; and straightening up she drew away, as, for an instant, a faint blush glowed over her cheek.

She stood alone. Then in a voice almost inaudible, she said:

"I can not reveal his name, Frank."

"Can not! Why, Agnes, what mean you?"

"I mean that I am oath-bound! But 'tis over now, Frank, and I think—the—that is—it will never be repeated. Let it pass. But, I am so glad *you* are here."

Frank Hayworth did not reply.

After some moments he bade the girl go to bed and rest in peace—that he would sleep in the little room adjoining, and would keep a wakeful eye.

Then, after a soft good-night, the young man retired to the room which he had mentioned.

The night passed and the dawn of another day broke; but the sun was high in the heavens, and broad flashes of his reflected light glittered in the room of Agnes Hope before the girl opened her eyes.

Frank Hayworth had long been up.

After dressing that morning, and while poor Agnes still slept, he crept softly down-stairs, and hurried out from the old house, in quest of a breakfast for the two. He was gone a half-hour, when he returned bringing a basket well-filled.

Then Agnes awoke, and was soon dressed. Then the two sat around the little table on which the nice breakfast was spread; and the time passed happily.

An hour from then Agnes accompanied Frank to the boarding-house at which he lodged.

The actor had already obtained a nice room for her. He dared not trust her to remain exposed all alone in the old house on Catharine street. Agnes had hinted to him gently, and with a blushing face, that the rent for two months was due, and that, at present, she had not the money to meet the claim. She also let the young man *infer* that the owner of the property, Mr. Wildfern, had asked for the rent.

Frank Hayworth had replied soothingly in a few words to all this; and then when Agnes was out of the room, he hastily wrote a note in pencil and placed it away in his pocket. When down-stairs, he fastened it on the front door, knowing well that Wildfern would be there, soon to look after his victim.

Of course the reader must know that Frank Hayworth *suspected* that Wildfern was the man who had forced his way into the chamber of Agnes Hope. That man was known to the actor, and the reputation he bore was none of the best.

The contents of that note, which Frank Hayworth pinned to the door, were brief. They simply informed Wildfern, that he, the actor, would be at his room—mentioning the street and number of the house—at certain hours, and that *he* would be prepared to liquidate any claims he had against Miss Agnes Hope.

Frank Hayworth got ready to go to rehearsal. He started with amazement when he saw that lady's gift—the diamond pin—was missing from his bosom.

At rehearsal the young man went through his part mechanically, missing his cues here and there, and making the stage manager frown.

When again he was free to go, the manager called Frank Hayworth aside, and told him firmly that he must be more heedful of his *role*, or he would lose the part assigned him.

The actor apologized, and promising to do better, yet not caring to tell the manager the cause of his remissness, left the theater and hurried down-town.

In a few moments he entered the *Ledger* office, and left an advertisement to appear for one week. The advertisement was for the lost pin.

Frank Hayworth was very busy that day; he locked himself in his room, and seemed determined to arouse himself from the state of lethargy into which he had fallen.

So he strode up and down the room, endeavoring to bring back the old fire, which, in a measure, he had lost. He partly succeeded, and a glow of satisfaction spread over his face and thrilled through his being.

It lacked yet two hours or more before it was time to go to the theater. Frank Hayworth glanced around him.

A daily paper caught his eye. He drew it toward him, and spreading it open looked leisurely through its teeming columns.

Suddenly his eye rested a little longer than usual on a paragraph. He read it again; and then again more intently. He laid the paper aside, and leaned his head on his hands, a grave shade growing over his face—a wild, yearning look coming to his eyes.

For some moments he sat thus.

At length he looked up, and once again taking the paper, drew near the dim light. Bending down close, he read aloud in a low but distinct voice:

"FOUND—At the Chestnut Street Theater, last night, a lady's ring—fine gold with a ruby setting. The owner can have it by applying at No. 11 Locust street, proving property and paying for this advertisement."

Frank Hayworth paused and looked down. He did not speak, but he was thinking—thinking of a ruby ring which he had once slipped upon a tapering, lily-white finger; thinking and dreaming over the old memories lying so quiet, so dead-like below the surface of the sea of time.

Arousing himself, however, the actor looked again

over the paper, half-smiling to himself, as he dismissed a strange thought which had crept apace through his brain. But scarcely had his eyes rested upon the sheet again, when once more he started, this time as though an arrow had darted into his bosom.

With a wild cry—one-half of joy, half of agony, the young man clutched the paper in his trembling grasp and held it almost in the flame itself.

Then he read this other advertisement, letter by letter, word by word.

"My God! Sadie! Sadie! And the ring! I'll go and see! yes—*now!*"

Without another word he snatched his hat and overcoat, and then walked swiftly down-stairs and strode rapidly away. At last he reached Locust street. In a few moments he stood before the door of the mansion in which we have seen Wildfern enter.

He rung the bell, and presently the summons was answered.

Frank Hayworth staggered back as he received to his inquiry this answer from Lady Maud:

"The ring has already been claimed, sir."

And then the actor, with an agonized bosom, reeled away.

The reader can imagine how *Hawkshaw* was rendered that night.

CHAPTER XXII.

GOD SPEED YOU, FROM AN ENEMY.

THAT night, when the actor left the theater, he did not return straight home, but strode away down the street. Reaching the Continental Hotel, he entered and examined the book of guests at the clerk's desk.

He did not find the name he was seeking.

He walked forth into the street, and as he reached the curb, he paused and pondered for a moment. Then he turned at once and hurried up the street. In a few moments he was at the St. Lawrence Hotel.

He entered, and going to the clerk's desk glanced carefully over the leaves of the register. But still, he did not find the name he was seeking.

As he was about closing the large book, he started slightly, when the leaves fell open at a certain point, and his eyes rested on an entry made some weeks before.

That entry read:

"MISS DAVIS AND MAID, VIRGINIA."

The young man gazed at the name for a moment; the word *Virginia* was familiar to the sight, but he knew of no Miss Davis. And then the entry was evidently in a man's handwriting.

With a sigh, Frank Hayworth turned and took his way toward home.

But he had not despaired of finding what he was seeking—that something suggested by the last advertisement he had read in the *LEDGER*.

He hurried on however, for the hour was late, and then he was almost certain that Agnes was sitting up waiting for him.

We might as well in this place tell the reader the advertisement which had so startled Frank Hayworth.

It read thus:

"FIFTY THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD for specific information as regards the whereabouts of my beloved daughter, Sadie Sayton. She left my home clandestinely a little over three weeks ago, and from what I can learn, and from what I suspect, she has gone to Philadelphia. Should this meet her eye, I beg her for her old love of me to return to her poor distracted father."

"Any one giving reliable information of my dear daughter can obtain the above reward, besides a father's undying gratitude, by addressing

"COLONEL SAYTON,
"Charles City C. H., Va."

Late this same night, two men in an open furniture-wagon drove up to the entrance of a small squalid alley below Fitzwater street and alighted,

No word was spoken, and the men disappeared in the alley. They were gone a few moments, when they returned bearing between them a large, heavy frame-work, which resembled rudely a printing-press. This they hurriedly yet softly deposited in the wagon, and at once returned up the alley.

A few moments elapsed when they reappeared a second time, bringing between them another similar apparatus, which they likewise deposited in the wagon.

Leaping into the wagon they drove away—not hastily, but slowly, guardedly. At length they reached Fifteenth street. Into this they turned.

As soon as they had well entered Fifteenth street, the driver struck the horse a smart blow and away the wagon rattled.

The men did not draw rein until they had reached Coates street, far away. Here they paused for a moment in their headlong career and looked cautiously about them.

Still there was no one in sight.

The wagon clattered on straight out Coates street. The thickly-inhabited portion of the thoroughfare was left behind; and then, at length they entered the limits of the park.

On they dashed, taking the road leading over the little bridge toward Lemon Hill. At the base of the hill they turned sharply, keeping the broad road leading around the cliffs and skirting the river.

All at once they drew rein. They had reached a point around the bend above the Bachelors' Barge-house.

There, tied to the bank, was a large row-boat lying motionless in the river.

In ten minutes they had transferred the singular wagon-load, they had hauled, to the boat, and leaping in shoved off the skiff, bent to the oars and were soon urging the craft against the freezing current, up-river.

The men rowed on—not pausing once for breath. The Girard avenue bridge was passed; then Columbia bridge; still the men urged the boat onward.

At length they drew near the silent shades of Laurel Hill Cemetery. Suddenly turning the head in-shore, they drove the craft rapidly through the thickly-forming ice, until it grated on the pebbles of the beach.

The men leaped ashore and at once set to work to unload the boat. Lading themselves this time with both of the singular-looking pieces of frame-work *at once*, they began the ascent of the sharp hill.

They were men of brawn, and they did not even stop once though the load they bore was enormous, and the hill they were ascending almost like a wall.

At last they reached the summit, and even here they did not stop.

They plunged ahead amid the snow, and amid the dense trees and pale spectral marbles, as if they were at home in the locality.

Suddenly, however, they paused at the entrance of an old, decayed vault, built into a shelving hill in the cemetery.

The men laid aside their load, and kicked away the thick snow before the door. Then one of them applied a key to the rusted lock, and the door of the charnel-house swung back.

The men waited not, but immediately lugged in the pieces of framework, and closed the door behind them.

The dawn was just breaking when two men entered the wagon, away by the boat-house, and drove off toward the city.

And in this early light it was easy to see that a sheet of ice covered the bosom of the Schuylkill.

The sun could not have been an hour high the next morning when the Lady Maud, having nicely arranged a large waiter, containing a bountiful breakfast, made her way up-stairs to Sadie's room.

Placing the waiter on the table, she gazed at the silent form of her who lay so motionless upon the bed.

Several moments elapsed, and still the Lady Maud

bent her eyes on the helpless form and childlike face of Sadie Sayton.

The girl turned in her sleep and murmured gently a few inaudible words, so faint indeed, that they scarcely broke the silence of the apartment. A sweet, heavenly smile, like the changes of a fading sunset, flitted over her face.

But as quick as lightning, and as if by magic, the smile fled frightened away—the lips contracted—the blood in them disappeared, leaving them almost colorless—a deadly pallor routed the rose from her cheeks, and a frown darkly wrinkled the sweet, sad face.

Then, suddenly, the nervous right hand—which had lain extended by the girl's side—darted out into life. It tightly gripped the flashing dirk-knife.

With a slight cry of alarm and astonishment, Lady Maud drew back; but instantly approached nearer and said in a low tone to herself:

"Thank God! She *has* defended herself. She defies him yet, and God willing, shall continue to do so!"

These were strange words coming from one of whom, we doubt not, the reader has formed a damaging estimate. But the low, earnest tone, the quivering lip, told that Lady Maud had spoken from the heart.

She waited a moment or so; and then, as the armed right hand sunk slowly to its resting place again, Lady Maud leaned down and whispered gently in the sleeper's ear.

The maiden started, her eyes suddenly opened, a shiver shot over her frame, and then, with a wild cry, Sadie covered her eyes and shrunk away.

"There, my poor child! be not alarmed—for I tell you I am your friend—your friend *in any extremity!*"

The Lady Maud spoke very decidedly, very earnestly—almost enthusiastically.

Sadie opened her eyes and glanced at her. At one look she saw that the woman had spoken truthfully.

"May God bless you!" she murmured.

Then Lady Maud seated herself by the bedside of the girl, and took the small, hot hand gently in hers.

A long conversation ensued—one in which there was a communion of heart with heart—one which proved that deep down in the fashionable worldly woman's bosom there was a well-spring of sympathy whose waters had been reached.

When that conversation was ended, the Lady Maud arose, leaned over the girl, kissed her softly, and bade her be of good cheer. Then she went out softly, closing the door behind her. As she left the room she inadvertently dropped from her bosom a morning paper which she had read and put there.

Sadie glanced around her, and then suddenly sat up in bed. She had heard the rustle of the paper; she was now looking for it.

She started as her eyes fell upon it.

Leaping lightly to the floor, she stooped, picked up the newspaper, and drew a chair directly under the light. Greedily spreading open the paper she began to read.

Up and down the closely-printed columns she glanced. Everything was read with avidity.

Suddenly, as she accidentally gazed over one of the advertising pages, she paused. Her eye burned down into the sheet before her—her bosom heaved, and she gasped for breath.

She had found and read her father's advertisement concerning herself!

The poor girl's brain reeled, and dropping the paper to the floor, she clapped her hands to her burning head. And then, as a copious flow of tears came to her relief, the maiden knelt down and prayed to God to give her strength.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A QUARTER-GRAIN OF MORPHINE.

THE day passed slowly away.

About four o'clock in the afternoon, Willis Wild-

fern rung the bell at the mansion in Locust street. He was quickly admitted by Lady Maud.

A long and earnest conversation took place between the two.

Wildfern smiled grimly, yet in a satisfied manner, when he learned that a person had called for the ring the night before, and that that person was our acquaintance, Frank Hayworth, the actor.

The man had laid his plans well, and he now knew that he had his game at advantage.

While sitting in the parlor this afternoon, he suddenly drew from his pocket a small parcel. Opening it, he let fall its contents into a glass half full of water. Then he handed the glass to Lady Maud, at the same time glancing at her significantly.

The woman started, and looked at him fearfully.

"What is it, captain?" she asked.

"Morphine, Lady Maud."

"Morphine! And for whom, Willis Wildfern?" and the woman did not take the glass.

The man frowned, and an oath was upon his lips; but he kept it back. He had keenly noted the change in deportment in Lady Maud, and he dared not offend her. He was afraid of the woman since that stormy night of the altercation, a few evenings before.

"Morphine! Yes, dear Lady Maud," he said. "The dose is not large; the powder contains a large amount of sugar. My object simply is to stupefy and bewilder the girl, that when she awakes she will the more readily consent to be my wife. There is only a quarter-grain of the opiate, Lady Maud."

"Are you telling me the truth—the truth, before God and man?" asked the woman, sternly.

"What do you know about God?" asked the man, with a sneer.

"Little enough, Captain Willis, but enough to fear Him!" was the quiet reply.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Wildfern. "You are turning moralist, Lady Maud! Ha! ha!"

Despite his laugh and mocking tone, however, there was a deep seriousness in the man's meaning; he did indeed fear that this woman who had been so long his tool was turning "moralist," as he phrased it.

But Lady Maud was in earnest. She kept her eyes bent on the man, as she said firmly:

"You may laugh as you wish, captain; but I can tell you one thing: I'll not give this draught to Sadie Sayton unless you swear solemnly to me that it contains no more than a quarter-grain of morphine."

"Sadie Sayton! Ha! You know, then, her name, my dear Lady Maud?" and Wildfern gazed furiously at her. "Whence did you derive your knowledge?" and his gaze deepened into icy-like sternness.

Wildfern was thinking of the money—the large sum which stood at the head of old Colonel Sayton's advertisement. Was Lady Maud aiming, too, for the reward-money?

All this revolved in his mind as he asked the woman the question he did. Then, as his eyes were riveted on her face, he awaited her answer.

This was not slow in coming.

"Where did I get my knowledge? Ha! ha! I hope you have not forgotten that I can read and that I sometimes peruse the papers! More than that, the girl answers to the name of Sadie; I have tried her."

"You have? Indeed! You have an inquiring mind, Lady Maud; and a displeasing mind, too! What did you tell the girl of me?"

"Nothing to your detriment, Willis Wildfern; though, had I been inclined to use it, I had ample material at hand," said the woman, in response.

"You speak well—boldly, Lady Maud!" muttered the man, still endeavoring to keep down his anger.

To this the woman did not reply, but fixing her eyes on him, said:

"This is nonsense, captain! Answer me—nay, swear to me that that water contains only a single quarter-grain of morphine."

The man winced, but he knew that the other's

eyes were fixed upon him, and he was compelled to reply:

"I swear to you, then, that what I have told you is the truth," he said. "But, why are you so particular about this matter? Methinks from your frequent administrations of the same remedy, under other circumstances, you had grown used to it, and to watching its wondrous effect."

"I will be frank with you, Wildfern," said the woman, after a slight pause, "I am tired of your rule, and—nay, do not interrupt me so soon—and I will be glad when the day comes that you will find no more villainy to do! More than that, I will be doably rejoiced when the hour comes for us to part. Now in this particular case, I will not administer a powerful drug, because the girl is already weak and faint, and a large dose would assuredly kill her. I will no longer be accessory to murder!"

Willis Wildfern bent his head, and pondered for several minutes. We cannot, or rather shall not, attempt to tell what was passing in his mind.

However, when he looked up, his face, if not smiling, was certainly not frowning. He said, calmly:

"Very good. As you say, Lady Maud! We will not quarrel. Administer the small dose this time, and, the hour for our separation may be nearer than you think!"

There was a world of latent meaning in Willis Wildfern's words.

Perhaps the Lady Maud did not fathom deep enough for that meaning; perhaps she did.

And in a few moments Wildfern arose to his feet. He placed his hand in his pocket, and drew out a large roll of new money—in paper. Reaching it over to Lady Maud, he said, in a low, significant tone:

"Here, Lady Maud, is a present. The notes are from our old mint in the cemetery—the first series of the new issue, struck off there. Take the notes; they will purchase as much as old SAYTON'S FIFTY THOUSAND IN GREENBACKS. But now I must go. Expect me late to-night, and be surprised at nothing."

Then he left the house.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ON THE SCENT.

As soon as Willis Wildfern was gone—and the night had then fallen—Lady Maud hurried up-stairs with the goblet in hand. Only a moment or so elapsed before she stood in Sadie's room.

She waited not to answer the girl's curiosity, but leaning down, whispered some words in her ear. And then she placed the goblet of water by her side.

Rising to her full height she turned to go, but as she neared the door, she paused and said:

"Be brave, Sadie: be true to yourself, and—do not forget your dagger!"

And then she was gone.

* * * It must have been near twelve o'clock that same night, when Willis Wildfern, disguised as we have seen him on former occasions, stood at the door of Sadie Sayton's room. He hesitated but a moment.

Turning the bolt he entered. He glanced like lightning around him.

Sadie was seated quietly in a chair by the bed.

The goblet was empty!

* * * We must go back a little way in our story, for the sake of having an even and unbroken thread—our aim thus far.

When Wildfern left the mansion of Lady Maud, early that evening, he hurried into Walnut street. There paused and glanced around him. A car was in sight coming along slowly. The man walked down to meet it, and then sprung aboard.

He had not observed a tall, brawny man, who had emerged from the gloom on the shady side of the street opposite the Locust street mansion, and followed on softly behind him. He had not seen this figure, which hung upon his track like a phantom.

As soon as Wildfern was in the cars, the person

who had stepped into the shade of a house at the corner, shrugged his shoulders, and turning at once retraced his steps toward the Locust street mansion. This man seemed to court obscurity—walking on the thin, unlit side of the street; but as he passed near a lamp, the reflection of the light struck for an instant, full upon his person.

As quick and fleeting as was the flash from the lamp, it revealed a bright row of brass buttons, and a star glittering on the breast of the man's coat; also a heavy baton belted in a sling around the waist.

Then the person was in the shade again, and he was still hurrying on toward Locust street.

In a few moments he turned into this latter thoroughfare, still keeping the shady side. And then he joined a companion, who stood motionless in the gloom directly opposite the residence of Lady Maud.

The men were policemen.

* * * Willis Wildfern did not get out of the car until it had reached the Schuylkill. Here he sprung out, and hurrying along Twenty-third street, at last reached Market. Here he paused for a moment, and for the time, seemed lost in reflection.

He did not consume many moments then; for suddenly he turned abruptly to the left, and strode away toward the Market street bridge. Some moments elapsed before he stood on the opposite side.

Skirting along the river-bank, he was speedily swallowed up in the gloom.

On he went, winding around the tall, frowning bluffs which bordered the banks of the river. At one time his figure could be seen by the faint starlight of the night; at another it would be wholly obscured in the deep gloom of the lonely road—or more properly speaking—path.

At length he reached the rear of Laurel Hill cemetery. Above him, on the heights, slept in almost absolute quiet the lone city of the dead.

The mournful sighing of the night-wind through the leafless branches of the trees, made a sad, melancholy music, which echoed down the bluff, that cold night, and fell on Wildfern's ear.

The man paused, and an involuntary shudder crept over his frame. He glanced quickly around him, as if he expected to see arise at his elbow some grim and ghastly phantom.

The man shook in every limb, and clung closer to the rock.

Suddenly, however, he drew from his breast-pocket a flask, and placing it to his lips, took a long, deep draught.

Then he plunged on again.

Suddenly he paused and stood as still as a statue; for at his feet, showing distinctly in the gloom, was the impression of footprints in the snow.

A tremor passed over the man's frame, a pallor, though it could not be seen, sprung to his face. He leaned down and examined the tracks closely; they were made by a large boot, and they were deeply indented, as if he who walked was a heavy man and trod boldly. And they led in the same direction that he was going!

Wildfern slowly arose to an erect posture, and glanced again cautiously around him.

Despite the bitter cold, despite the strong draught he had swallowed, he trembled like a leaf, and a sweat broke out profusely on his face.

Once more he drew out the flask, and applying it to his lips, drank deeply, almost draining the contents before he breathed.

"I must begone!" he muttered. "I feel a deep gloom hanging over me! I feel a rope around my neck. But—but—first, Sadie shall be mine! Then for a final settlement of the old scores with certain parties, and I'll be off! Philadelphia, nay, the broad land itself, will be too hot for me, and that in a very few days. Once this ravishingly beautiful girl conquered, *then*, my Lady Maud, we may measure our hatred and our knives! But I must begone."

So saying, he turned at right-angles to the direction in which he was first proceeding and strode away quickly.

After walking on for some two hundred yards, he again turned to the left, virtually resuming the old course he had left.

All at once, however, he stopped, as a small, bright light flashed out from a gloomy pile before him.

"Ha!" he muttered, in an anxious tone. "Tom is careless! and there are visitors on the hill!"

So speaking, he hurried on, and in a moment had entered the vault and closed the door. In an instant, then, the light ceased to shine.

Scarcely had Wildfern entered the vault, when a noiseless band, consisting of at least twenty men, suddenly emerged from the gloom, and drew silently around the vault.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BACK TRACK.

WILLIS WILDFERN glanced around him as he entered the vault. Tom, with his coat off, was working vigorously at a press. The result of his work was piled in a large heap on a table. The pile consisted of bank-notes, so nicely and accurately engraved from photographic blocks, that the closest inspection failed to detect in them any defect whatsoever.

The negro paused as Wildfern entered.

"Glad to see you, cap'n," he said, cordially.

But Wildfern did not say a word, but, walking straight to the glowing lamp, he drew a screen over it, thus confining the rays to the gloomy vault. Then he said, in a half-scared, half-angry tone:

"You should be more careful, Tom! I saw the reflection of that light plainly, twenty yards from the door. You should have screened the lamp, or covered the slot; and I tell you we can not be too careful. There are visitors on the 'Hill' to-night!"

"De debbill! How you know dat?" and Tom glanced quickly at the other.

"From the best of proofs; I have seen tracks, and they were not made by a lady's slipper! But, put up the press, and tie up the money—we have enough, Tom, to last us a few years anyway—this will do. Now I want to talk a little with you."

Then a low conversation ensued, lasting nearly an hour. When it had ended, the men arose to their feet.

"You must not fail me, Tom," said Wildfern; "you can get the carriage and horses at the same place, you know. Be *mean* and be discreet! After to-night we must change quarters. . . . Now, we'll go."

As he spoke he drew near the door to reconnoiter. Then he put his eye to a long, narrow, perpendicular slot in the door, and peered around outside.

Then he started violently; his limbs shook beneath him, and turning softly, he said, in a low, agitated voice:

"We're caged, Tom! Look—but be careful."

He gave way for the other as he uttered these words. The black instantly took his place, and placing his red eyes to the opening, looked out.

He ground his teeth together, and then, with a threatening gesture, quickly felt under his coat-bosom for his knife.

No wonder these men were startled; for, standing around the vault, were numbers of silent, stalwart figures. The pale, ghastly glimmer from the snow, twinkling on the brass buttons of their coats, told that they were policemen. They were almost as motionless as statues, and their gaze was bent upon the door of the vault.

Silently, even as they who stood without, did the two within draw away from the entrance toward the rear of the vault.

"Yes, cap'n, we's caged sure enough!" said the negro. "But we can double on 'em by *de back track*, and teach 'em a trick yet," and he smiled grimly.

"Yes, Tom," replied Wildfern, in an excited un-

dertone. "I understand you; the *Rat Hole and the keg of powder*, eh?"

"Exactly so, cap'n," said the negro, himself beginning to partake of the excitement.

"Then we'll pack the money, and lay the train, for time is precious."

As Wildfern spoke he strode to the table, and began to pack tightly the counterfeit notes.

In a few moments the task was done, and the several bulky parcels were placed in a bag. Then, Wild Tom going into the rear of the vault brought back a keg of medium size. He unscrewed a wooden plug from the bottom of the keg, and then beginning at the table, laid a train of powder all the way to the door of the vault. Connecting with this terminus of the train, Wild Tom placed the keg itself.

Then Wildfern, taking the globe off from the lamp, tied a twine to the handle of the latter, and placed the flaming light just beyond, *but in a line with*, the powder, and then quickly attached the cord to the vault door.

When the door should be opened, the result can easily be imagined.

Glancing around them once more, the men with a low laugh disappeared in the rear of the vault.

A half-hour elapsed, when suddenly they appeared again, working their way slowly out of the side of the loamy, frosty hill, back of Laurel Hill. In a few moments they stood in the broad, snow-covered pleasure road below, and then they hurried off and were soon out of sight.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN THE HANDS OF THE FOWLER.

WILDFERN and his singular companion paused for nothing, but kept up a vigorous stride, bending their steps toward the city.

As they reached Spring Garden street, the clock on the hall-tower at the corner above, struck eleven.

"Come, come, Tom—we must hurry," muttered Wildfern. "'Tis later than I thought."

Just before they reached Chestnut street, they saw the large outpouring streams of people flowing in different directions. They knew that the play was over. But they paused not.

Just, however, as they stood by the little back alley running up to the rear of the Chestnut Street Theater, a man and a woman—the latter hanging on the arm of the other—emerged from the dark passageway.

Wildfern and Tom were close behind them, and Wildfern knew both the man and the woman.

"I am sorry, Agnes," said the man, in a low voice, "that I consented for you to come and witness the performance. I was fearful of the effect it might exert upon your nerves. And—and Agnes, I wanted to speak with you to-night in my room—to tell you a tale—to draw from you your sisterly sympathy. Now, I am afraid that—"

"Be afraid of nothing, Frank, my brother," interrupted the girl in a sweet, confiding voice. "Now, that I am in the purer atmosphere, I feel better, and, Frank, I will listen to any thing you may have to say."

Then the two hurried on down toward Twelfth street.

Willis Wildfern and Tom had heard this conversation—word for word. The latter paid no heed to it; the former drank in every syllable.

And then a strange revolution took place in Willis Wildfern's bosom—a weird, sinister and yet triumphant gleam flashed in his eye, and he laughed a low laugh all to himself.

When the two reached Chestnut street, they took the shady side of Twelfth and hurried to Locust. Then down this avenue.

As they reached Eleventh street Wildfern suddenly paused, and drew Tom quickly in the shade of a large house.

"Sh! sh! Tom! See yonder!" and he pointed down the street.

"Blue-coats again, cap'n! Yes—I sees 'em. They've got their peepers on Lady Maud's shanty now! Ha! ha!" and the negro laughed guardedly.

"Yes—yes—and trouble is brewing—I feel it! Now, Tom, you must change the programme. Bring the carriage to the alley, between Locust and Spruce, in Twelfth. That alley leads to the yard of the house. 'Twill be all right. Now be off, Tom. In a half-hour hence I shall look for you at that alley."

Tom did not reply, but turning about walked up to Thirteenth street and disappeared in the darkness.

Wildfern waited a few minutes, and then followed after him. He paused, however, at the street above mentioned, and then returning toward Chestnut stopped at Walnut. Down the street he strode, until he reached Tenth. Here he again turned, going this time toward the south.

He walked rapidly on, not halting once again. On he went, and now he was near Fitzwater street. He slackened his pace and glanced over at the opposite row of houses.

Then, all at once, he stopped, as suddenly a light streamed from a window in one of these houses. He glanced thitherward, and as a low cry of exultation burst from his lips he turned at once and hurried back.

Verily Willis Wildfern was a man of iron to endure such exercise as he had taken this night!

We will now return to the time he entered the room of Sadie Sayton, and looked maliciously yet triumphantly around him.

His eyes, after flashing over the maiden, sought the goblet.

Then again he looked toward the girl.

"My God!" he muttered to himself, "the dose was enough to stupefy an elephant. But—but—as matters are, 'tis all right after all."

He turned familiarly into the room and seated himself. The girl drew away, and covered her face with her hands.

"Be not alarmed," said the man composedly; "I come on business. When last here I told you that I could show you a proof of this actor's perfidy. To-night I have brought it. Here is the diamond-pin he wore, and which I *think you gave him*. I received it from the woman he now loves. Take it, and examine it; you will recognize it," and taking the jewel from his pocket he handed it to Sadie.

The girl shuddered, and then raising her head, reached out her hand and took the pin. One glance at it, and with a wild, agonizing cry, she tottered to her feet, and fell half-swooning upon the bed.

In her agony of mind she let fall the pin. Wildfern stooped and picked it up, transferring it to his pocket, *as he thought*. But he did not thus transfer it. In the eagerness with which he watched the girl, he did not notice that he failed to find the pocket.

The diamond rolled noiselessly to the floor.

"Oh, God! False—false! And I trusted *him* so blindly—loved him so tenderly! And thus for my dream to end! Oh, God! I cannot live! Crush me to the earth—blot out my memory!" and heedless of the presence of the man, she buried her face in the bed-covering and sobbed aloud.

Willis Wildfern arose to his feet and softly approached the bed. Then he laid his hand upon the girl's.

Sadie started as if bitten by an asp. In a moment she had escaped him and stood on the opposite side of the room, a gleaming knife in her hand.

"Stand back, monster!—stand back, or advance at your peril! I am desperate!" and she warningly brandished the dagger.

The man paused.

"I do not mean to harm you," he said. "I simply wish to tell you, my pretty one, that I have got one more proof to show you—one which will convince you beyond a peradventure that Frank Hayworth cares nothing for you. Would you, my fair girl, see that other proof?" and he gazed at her eagerly.

A strange calmness suddenly came over Sadie—a

something within her which she could not define urged her to listen and to ponder.

A moment or so elapsed, when she looked up and said, in a voice preternaturally composed and quiet:

"Yes—I *would* see this other proof! For only then can I—will I—believe in *his* faithlessness!"

"Be it so!" said Wildfern, promptly; "you *shall* see this proof; but on these conditions: you will agree to be blindfolded, and will accompany me hence in a carriage, placing yourself wholly under my charge."

Sadie Sayton started—her face was pale as ashes.

"And how can I trust you?" she asked, with a gesture of loathing.

"I will swear solemnly any oath which *you* may dictate, that I will not harm you," was the reply.

Sadie pondered. Something seemed to impel her on. A maddening desire to see the perfidy of the man whom she had loved so devotedly, drove her to do—what an hour before she would have shrunk from even entertaining for an instant.

"I accept your terms," she said, in an ice-like tone. "But I warn you that I can and will defend myself, if occasion demand it."

"I do not object; but come. The hour is late, and the show I am to unveil to your eyes is now ready. The performance may be over unless we hurry!" and he laughed satirically.

The girl answered not a word. She at once set about making her preparations.

Wildfern did not leave the room. In ten minutes Sadie was ready. In a few moments then—her hand grasping the dagger in her dress-pocket—she allowed her eyes to be blindfolded. Then taking the man's hand in hers, she left the room, and followed him who had held her a prisoner so closely.

At the foot of the stairs Lady Maud, looking stern and determined, suddenly appeared.

"I will go along for a change of air," she said, giving Wildfern a deep, significant look.

In a moment more the three were out in the yard. Then the gate in the wall was found, and they entered the alley—Sadie being between Lady Maud and Wildfern.

At last they reached the street. A carriage was there—a gigantic black man on the driver's box.

The three entered the vehicle, which was at once driven away rapidly.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE DARKEST HOUR IS BEFORE THE DAWN.

THE carriage rolled and jolted on. The snow of the street was now cleared away—from the car-tracks at least. The vehicle was soon in these—on the Tenth street line—and it dashed away now, evenly and smoothly.

On rolled the carriage—the horses' feet echoing loud and clear as they moved away from the more noisy portion of the city.

Then the driver spoke to the animals in a low but distinct tone of command.

The carriage at once ceased its rapid motion.

Wildfern placed his head out of the carriage and glanced around.

"This will do; stop here, coachman," he said, in a low voice. "Now, my girl, as you value your life, keep quiet!" whispered Wildfern, hoarsely, in the ear of Sadie. "I will remove the bandage at once, and then you can look through the curtainless window to your left. Don't tremble so, or I will be afraid to trust you."

In the twinkling of an eye the blindfold was drawn from her eyes.

Sadie turned and gazed straight up at the flashing window.

With a wild cry, which she could not suppress, she instantly covered her face, and as a low, gurgling groan came from her bosom, she sunk back in the carriage.

That one glance had been enough.

"Oh, false! false! Oh, God! now I am ready to die! False! false!"

And again her agonizing cry wailed out distinctly in the air.

"Sh! 'sh! By Heavens! this must be stopped!" exclaimed Wildfern, fiercely, at the same time covering her face with a handkerchief saturated with chloroform.

"Deal gently with her, Willis Wildfern! Gently, I tell you!" hissed the Lady Maud, as her bosom heaved with contending emotions.

But in a moment the girl's struggles ceased.

Then the carriage drove off.

Suddenly, as the vehicle moved away at a rapid rate, the poor girl, freeing herself from the handkerchief, again uttered a long wailing cry—this time for help.

In a moment the window of that house was suddenly hurled up, and Frank Hayworth peered forth. But the carriage was now under full headway and dashed up the street.

Then it was out of sight.

A short time thereafter Sadie Sayton was again in her prison-room, seated on the edge of her bed and buried deep in thought.

The gas, as ever, was burning low.

Suddenly Sadie paused, as if stricken by a rifle-ball. She glanced down on the carpet at her feet.

Her eyes had caught the sparkle and flash of a brilliant stone.

She stooped like a hawk on its quarry, and, in a second, had grasped the diamond-pin let fall by Willis Wildfern. She held it in a grip of iron. Then she slowly raised it on high, and gazed at it with a steady, strong stare.

As she gazed, gradually the meaningless stare left her eyes, the stern expression of her face faded away, and as a soft, old time yearning look came again to the girlish countenance, she tottered forward and fell on her knees by the bedside.

Seconds, minutes, and then an hour passed. Then Sadie arose from her knees.

Her face was as calm as that of a marble Dian, as sweet and as holy as a Madonna's.

She gently kissed the little jewel, which she still held in her hand, and murmured:

"Oh, God! I love him still! I trust him still!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SETTLING A BILL.

THE carriage in which Sadie was taken down to see the terrible sight which had unnerved her, drove rapidly away. Wildfern was seated with the driver—Wild Tom, the negro.

They shaped their course toward Fairmount. Suddenly, when the carriage was descending the sharp hill at the further end of Coates street, a bright glare, away toward Laurel Hill Cemetery, flashed far up into the black sky. Then in an instant all was darkness again, as there came a long, rumbling, deadened report. Then all was still.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Wildfern, maliciously. "I had entirely forgotten our blue-coated friends, who have just now sprung the mine! Well—joy to them."

And then the vehicle disappeared.

* * * We cannot wonder at the effect produced upon Sadie Sayton, by the sight revealed to her through the curtainless window of the boarding-house on South Tenth street.

What she saw was this: Frank Hayworth—as we know him—was seated at a table, his head bowed down upon his breast. Standing partly above him, and grasping one of his hands in hers—the other laid tenderly upon his head—was Agnes Hope.

And they were in the full glare of the light!

But those who sat in the carriage had not heard the gentle, sympathizing words of Agnes as she smoothed back the actor's tangled hair, and said:

"Cheer up, my brother. My heart warms for you; and I will bless the day when Sadie's hand shall rest in yours."

The dawn of the next day glowed over the world.

Frank Hayworth was seated moodily in his room. Gloom was still upon his brow, the shadows were

swarming around him, despite the brilliant splendor of the day.

Suddenly there came a ring at the bell; and then steps were heard ascending the stairs. They paused at the actor's door. Then came a decisive rap.

"Come in!" said Hayworth.

The door was at once opened and Willis Wildfern, attired in the "tip" of fashion, entered the room.

The actor arose to his feet—his face growing darker and his brow contracting. But Wildfern did not wait for the other to speak. He drew a small strip of paper from his pocket and handed it toward the occupant of the room.

"Is that your writing, sir?" he asked.

Frank Hayworth glanced over the paper.

It was the strip he had tacked to the door of the old tenement-house in Catharine street, in which had lived the Widow Hope.

"Yes, sir; that is my writing," replied the actor, quietly. "Not knowing your address, and, for good reasons, thinking that you occasionally looked after your tenants, I took that, as the best method, to convey to you the information thereon scribbled."

"Thank you for your information, sir, *however* conveyed; I have called for the rent."

"You shall have it at once. Please write a receipt," pointing to pen, ink and paper on the table, and Frank Hayworth drew from his pocket-book several notes.

Wildfern leisurely approached the table, and, with a languid air, wrote the required receipt. Then the actor handed him the money.

Some change was due, and Wildfern felt in his vest-pocket for it. As he drew out a handful of currency, a ring with a ruby setting fell from among the notes and rolled on the table.

In an instant Frank Hayworth's eyes had flashed upon the ring, and he reached to grasp it.

But Wildfern was too quick for him—for he clutched the jewel and transferred it to his pocket.

"Where did you get that ring, Willis Wildfern?" asked the actor, in a low stern voice.

"An impudent and an unwarrantable question, sir! But, to satisfy your womanish curiosity, I will reply: From a pretty Virginia girl—Sadie Sayton!"

At a bound Hayworth dashed madly toward him.

Villain and falsifier! You lie!"

Wildfern quickly retreated behind the table, and drawing a revolver, aimed it at the other.

"Stand back!" he exclaimed in a low, hissing voice: "or I'll shoot you through the heart! Another time, and I'll make you eat your words, my fine fellow!"

With this he turned suddenly, opened the door and hurried down-stairs.

About four o'clock that afternoon, Willis Wildfern covertly entered the little alley—opening into Twelfth street—and hurried down Eleventh.

In a moment he had reached the gate in the wall, through which entrance was had into the yard of Lady Maud's mansion. Then he was in the house.

Lady Maud was standing at the bottom of the stairs; but she did not speak to her visitor.

Wildfern noted her manner, and he read its meaning. But he pretended to observe nothing.

"I have just dropped in, Lady Maud, to say that it will be late to-night before I can visit this girl—my wife to be. So don't lock up; I'll come the back way. Be sure to have everything ready."

Then Wildfern hurried away again from the house.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A GLIMMER OF LIGHT.

ONCE again night had come, and with it duties which could not be postponed by Frank Hayworth, the actor. At the usual hour he bade Agnes goodbye and hurried away toward Chestnut street.

Then the play was over. How Frank got through his part, he did not know. But when the curtain was down he hurried away toward his lodging on Tenth street, and soon stood again in his room.

He turned the light on. As he did so he perceived a note lying on the table. He opened it and read:

"DEAR FRANK:—I felt lonesome to-night all alone, and having nothing to do to while away the time I have determined to pay a visit to the old house on Catharine street. I wish to get a few articles I forgot to bring away with me. I write this that you may go to bed and not be uneasy about me, for it may be late before I return. "Your sister,

"Half-past nine o'clock.

AGNES."

Frank Hayworth glanced at his watch. It was now after eleven.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed; "how imprudent! And all alone! I will go for her at once."

A few moments from that time Frank Hayworth strode down toward Catharine street, up which he turned, and hurried on. Suddenly he paused as a long, piercing cry for help rung out on the still air. And then another and another cry; and then the shrieks struggled forth in a gurgling sound. Then all was quiet.

Frank Hayworth knew that cry. His blood almost congealed within him, and then it boiled! With an imprecation, which he could not restrain, upon his lips, he sprung forward at a run.

Only a moment elapsed before he stood at the door of the old house, which the reader knows well.

He sprung into the dark hall, and in a moment his feet were spurning the creaking staircase. Then he reached the top, and in a moment had burst like a whirlwind into the front room, in which a light was gleaming.

The sight which fell on the actor's vision filled his soul with horror, and stung him to vengeance.

Lying on the bed, her hair disheveled, her garments torn and in disarray, her face bloodless and deathlike, her hands nerveless and hanging by her side, lay Agnes Hope, limp and motionless.

Standing over her and clutching her in a wicked grasp—his eyes burning and his breast heaving, was Willis Wildfern, the man about town. In his hand was a bloody knife, and the ruby gore was welling from Agnes Hope's forehead. But the incision was slight.

The scoundrel raised his head as Frank Hayworth rushed into the room, and in an instant he thrust his other hand in his bosom.

But the actor heeded not the menacing gesture. Striding fearlessly into the room, he exclaimed in a deep, indignant voice:

"Villain! monster! *And would you thus disfigure YOUR OWN SISTER?*"

Wildfern straightened up, staggered away and flung his hands to his head. His face paled, and his eyes seemed to start from their sockets. He clutched at a chair for support and gasped out:

"What mean you—what say you?"

"That Agnes Hope is your half-sister—that your father was hers—that she is your own flesh and blood."

"My God! How know you this?"

"I have the proof—a marriage-certificate," was the reply.

Wildfern uttered no further word; but with his face like a dead man's, he staggered away, he reeled out of the room and tottered down-stairs.

The actor did not endeavor to prevent him; he stood to one side and allowed the man to pass.

The actor turned toward the bed on which lay the girl.

Agnes had swooned; she had not heard a word of what had passed between the men.

Frank Hayworth suddenly paused as he saw the glitter of something bright and sparkling at his feet. He stooped and picked it up.

He started, and a cry of joy broke from him as he saw that he held in his hand a ring with a ruby setting! In an instant he had placed it in his pocket. Then he approached the unconscious girl.

He succeeded readily in arousing her, and in ten minutes the two were on their way homeward.

They had not proceeded two squares before, suddenly, the fire-bells rung out a wild, startling alarm. Then a bright, up-reaching glow flashed in the dark night.

The fire was in the direction of Eleventh and Locust streets.

CHAPTER XXX.

A HERO AND HIS REWARD.

THERE were others than Frank Hayworth and Agnes Hope who saw the sudden crimsoning of the sky that cold winter night.

Willis Wildfern, his head reeling, his feet tottering beneath him, his ears ringing out the words of the actor: "AND WILL YOU THUS DISFIGURE YOUR OWN SISTER!" heard the clanging bells and the cry of fire and saw the sky suddenly grow red with the glimmer of the up-licking flames.

The man paused and gazed far down the street toward the bright, spreading reflection. Then a rattling fire-engine with its noisy band of red-shirted heroes, dashed by with its clatter and clangor.

Wildfern hailed one of the firemen.

"Where is the fire, my man?" he asked.

"Locust, 'bove 'leventh;" was the reply, as the fireman hurried on with his shouting company.

"Locust above Eleventh!" muttered Wildfern, leaning for an instant against a tree-box.

He buttoned his coat tightly around him, and dashed away at full speed.

Frank Hayworth, half-carrying the fainting form of Agnes in his arms, hastened along as rapidly as he could toward his lodgings.

At last he stood on the steps of the lodging-house.

Whispering to Agnes to go in and seek her bed, he turned at once and dashed away toward the fire.

Willis Wildfern at length reached Locust street. As he was rushing around the corner, he suddenly felt some one touch him on the shoulder. Glancing quickly about him, he saw the tall form of Wild Tom.

"Come along, Tom!" he exclaimed in a deep, labored voice. "The thing's up! Lady Maud has hauled down her colors. The old hag has gold! Help yourself to it, while I attend to other matters!"

"Dat's what I'm here for, Marse Cap'n!" replied the negro.

Then they dashed on through the surging crowd, and in a moment had entered the burning house.

The fire seemed to be at the rear of the mansion; the flames were bursting forth there. The long hall of the front building was filled with smoke. Firemen were on the first floor; but they dared not face the fiery element raging above.

Willis Wildfern knew a back way to reach the second story. Followed by Tom, the man dashed through the smoke-curtained hall until he reached the door leading to the yard.

Here was the small back staircase.

Wildfern had scarcely set foot on the first step, when, suddenly, he was confronted by Lady Maud, who rose like a giant from the half-lurid gloom.

"Stand back, man!" she hissed in his face, at the same time jerking a long, keen knife from her bosom, and baring her stalwart right arm. "Stand back, Willis Wildfern! I know your hellish purpose! I know that blood is on your soul, and I tell you I'll die before you enter the room of Sadie Sayton! Now, villain, stand back, or—come on and cross knives with me!" and the brawny woman flung herself full on his way.

Wildfern did not hesitate long. In an instant his knife, too, was in his hand; and then, with a cry of vengeance, he flung himself upon his adversary.

At that instant a tall, athletic figure, coatless, hatless, ax in hand, rushed with flying feet into the passage. The glimmer of the lurid light to the rear shone in his face.

Lady Maud turned and saw that face.

"On with you, Frank Hayworth! Up-stairs—second room to right!"

And with a loud cry Frank Hayworth sprung up, and disappeared amid the flame and smoke.

In a moment he was up-stairs, at the designated door. The ax circled around his head, and the panel was shivered to atoms. Another blow, and the door fell with a crash!

Hayworth bounded in.

Kneeling by the bedside, her long, golden-hued hair falling in disordered masses over her half-bare shoulders, her hands clasped tremblingly together, her eyes cast aloft, was Sadie Sayton.

She was praying to the God of heaven and earth!

"SADIE!"

"ALLAN!"

And the two confronted each other.

"Art true to me still, Allan?" whispered the girl.

"As the needle to the star!"

No other words were spoken by them. There was no time—no need.

In a moment the actor had grasped the tender woman's form in his arms. Nerving himself for the mighty effort—the trying ordeal—he whispered:

"Be brave, Sadie, and trust me."

Then he darted from the room, around which now the flames were licking; then down-stairs—then through the stagnant curtains of hot smoke, out into the air of the night.

Then a wild shout swelled forth from the swaying crowd without, and Frank Hayworth, with his burden, sunk swooning amid the enthusiastic throng.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A LITTLE RETRIBUTION.

"SAVED! Thank God!" muttered the Lady Maud, as she heard the ringing cheer. "Now, Willis Wildfern, we'll settle accounts forever!" and she dashed with the fury of a tiger upon him.

They had fought their way to the little back way, and at last stood directly over the concealed well.

In their mad, furious efforts, the lid which covered the chasm was hurled aside.

At that moment Lady Maud drove her knife full into the neck of Wildfern just as his dagger sheathed itself deep in her bosom.

They sunk to the ground with a cry and a groan.

Then from the gloom of the overhanging wall suddenly emerged a tall, gigantic figure.

It was Wild Tom.

Stooping down, after glancing about him, he seized both of the writhing forms in his powerful grasp and hurled them headlong down the gaping well.

There came up one wild, gurgling, spluttering cry, and Tom was about to step away, but he paused—for at that moment three brawny policemen darted through the smoke into the yard.

Tom hesitated not, but sprung to the gate in the wall, and dashed out into the alley. Two of the policemen rushed after him but the third one paused as he stood on the very brink of the well and chanced to glance down.

The sight revealed made the sturdy officer stand back and exclaim:

"Great God!"

But, hesitating no longer, he likewise sprung through the gate and followed on to join his companions in the chase.

He had not gone a moment before the walls of the backbuilding fell with a terrible crash—debris filling the yard and choking up the well.

Then the flames communicated to the front portion of the house, and despite the heroic efforts of the firemen, it was, in a few moments, enveloped in swaying billows of flame.

Tom fled away like wind. At first he distanced his pursuers; but those men, like himself, were men of iron, nor once lost sight of him.

On he dashed, and at length he reached the river. He was panting with exertion. He glanced around him. There, not a hundred paces behind him, came the policemen. Then suddenly a flash spitted out

in the gloom, and a whizzing bullet sung over Tom's head.

The negro hesitated no longer; he darted to the river-bank, and, without pausing a moment, sprung out upon the ice, which was now a half-foot thick.

On—on! And now Girard avenue bridge showed dimly in the gloom. Tom was already within its huge shadow.

Then suddenly he disappeared from sight; and a moment after a heavy, sullen splash reverberated beneath the long span, and echoed in the night-air.

The policemen, who had followed, hastened on, and in a few minutes they stood by a large hole in the black ice. For a moment they silently gazed on.

Then one of them said in a low voice:

"Well, it's all right! The black rascal has gone down in the air-hole, and the gallows is cheated, that's all. Come, let's go back!"

Without another word, the officers hurried away.

They had not been gone two minutes when, suddenly, a dark object appeared above the water in the air-hole. Then the body of a man showed.

Placing his hands on the broken edge of the ice, the man slowly drew himself out of the freezing water, and crawling carefully away from the treacherous spot, he straightened himself up,

"Ha! ha!" he chuckled, "a mons'rous close shave, dat! But dat 'fernal air-hole dar give me a lift after all! . . . I'll change dese rags, and den—why I think it's 'bout time to *git!*"

Thus speaking, Tom shook himself like a water-dog, and hurrying away, disappeared up the ice-covered river.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

L'ENVOI!

THE morning after the great fire on Locust street, Frank Hayworth (or Allen Hill), seated in the little parlor of the boarding-house, suddenly started as his eyes fell upon a certain notice in the paper.

He read that notice several times. Then, as a singular expression came to his face—an expression of sadness and sunlight mingled—he rose to his feet, and walked slowly from the room.

He ascended the stairs and reaching his own room, rapped gently on the panel.

Agnes answered the summons.

"Is Sadie awake, my sister?" asked the young man, in a low, trembling voice.

"Yes, Frank, and dressed. Come in," and Agnes made way for him to enter.

The actor, paper in hand, walked into the room. He passed no salutations with the maid he loved, but, drawing near her, knelt by her side, took her hand in his, and said, feelingly:

"Nerve yourself, Sadie, and read that paragraph," and without further word, he gave her the paper.

Sadie did as directed.

One glance and her face paled, and the blood fled away from her lips. Then dropping the paper, she raised her eyes aloft, and murmured:

"Thy will, oh Lord, be done!"

Then she drew Agnes to her side and pillowed her head on her sympathizing bosom.

That notice read tersely thus:

"If this should meet the eye of Miss Sadie Sayton, of Sayton Manor, Charles City County, Va., she is earnestly requested to return at once to her home. It is our sad duty thus to announce the death of her father, who passed away praying for her presence, and blessing her name.

"(Signed), ARTHUR GORDON,
"JAMES CLARK,
"Executors of the Sayton Estate."

We will not linger here. There is no need. Suffice it to state that Allan Hill never appeared on the stage again.

We shall not attempt to describe the meeting between Fanny and her long-lost mistress, which took place this same day—the one after the fire.

In one week—during which time Allan Hill had transferred his lodgings to the St. Lawrence Hotel, taking along with him the shrinking, pale-faced, yet happy-hearted Agnes—the party left for New York. There they took passage for Virginia.

And the gentle Agnes, whom Sadie already loved devotedly, went with the party.

Six months from that time, in the grand old mansion of Sayton Manor, Allan Hill and Sadie, the heiress, stood up in the face of a large company, and plighted their faith, the one to the other.

When the ceremony was over, Sadie, in a quiet moment, archly drew from beneath the glove of her left hand a small jewel, and holding it up to Allan, said in his ear:

"Here, darling husband; I give you again the diamond-pin, which you *did not* bestow upon another fair one!"

Allan Hill bowed his fine head; and then drawing from his pocket a parcel, he handed it to Sadie, saying:

"And I restore to you, my sweet wife, the ring which you did not bestow upon a treacherous man!"

And at that marriage ceremony Agnes Hope officiated as bridesmaid. Nor did any one in that vast company which thronged Sayton Manor, save Allan Hill and herself, know the great sacrifice which the noble girl had made!

Months after the conflagration at the mansion of the unfortunate, misguided, and to-be-pitied Lady Maud, when the bricks had cooled, workmen gathered there to clear away the rubbish, preparatory to erect on the spot a more lordly dwelling.

In clearing away the ruins from the little back yard, the well was exposed to view. Down this well one of the workmen chanced to glance.

The terrible sight then revealed, led to an investigation, and two half-charred, half-decayed bodies were discovered. They were readily recognized, however, as those of Wildfern and Lady Maud.

Several years passed, and one morning Allan Hill paused as he read a death-notice.

That day, in the presence of his wife, he read the notice to the sweet-faced, pensive Agnes; and then, showing her an old, faded marriage-certificate, told her the secret of her birth, her relationship to the wicked Willis Wildfern, and then informed her of her wealth.

Allan and his wife accompanied Agnes Hope to Philadelphia.

There was no trouble in getting possession of her property.

But Agnes returned, after making suitable arrangements with a lawyer in regard to her riches, back to Virginia with Allan Hill and Sadie.

There she lives to-day, quiet and happy.

And Allan and his darling wife are happy, too—happy as the parents of two lovely twin daughters, one of whom answers to the name of "Agnes," the other, the fair-haired, to that of "Ruby."

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